

TONIO ANDRADE

The Last Embassy

The Dutch Mission of 1795 and the Forgotten
History of Western Encounters with China



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FORGOTTEN HISTORY OF WESTERN
ENCOUNTERS WITH CHINA



Tonio Andrade

PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS

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for Josephine,

whose enthusiasm brightens our lives

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A NOTE TO THE READER

THIS BOOK IS designed to provide both an immersive narrative and a historical argument. If you're in the mood for a story, skip to [Chapter 1](#). If you feel like a thesis statement and some historiography, read the Prologue first. If you're not sure, start with [Chapter 1](#) and return to the Prologue later, if you wish.

THE LAST EMBASSY

PROLOGUE

A Clash of Cultures?

IN 1794, the Qianlong emperor prepared to mark his sixtieth year on the throne. It was an auspicious anniversary—sixty years is a complete cycle in China’s calendar—and he was a revered ruler, having shepherded the realm through a period of unprecedented prosperity and expansion. His subjects proposed a New Year’s extravaganza: feasts, fireworks, poetry parties, and plays. Dukes and princes and great ministers would offer congratulations. Gifts worth fortunes would be bestowed in the world’s most magnificent palaces and gardens. Among the celebrants would be exotic guests: Mongol princes, Manchu nobles, Uighur chieftains, Tibetan lamas, and Korean gentlemen. The emperor took joy in the variety of humanity. He conceived of himself as a universal monarch, his court the center of the diverse, multiethnic, and multireligious world of his time.

Although he insisted that he didn’t want ostentatious festivities, he did like to be celebrated, so he was delighted to learn that a country from across the Western Oceans—Holland—wanted to send congratulations. Europeans were among the most exotic people in the world, with their curly hair, tight pants that looked like underwear, and strange manners. The ambassadors—a Dutch scholar named Isaac Titsingh and a crafty businessman named Andreas Everardus van Braam Houckgeest—had sent a letter begging for the favor of gazing upon the imperial visage. The emperor wrote an affirmative reply: “Let the ambassadors come to the capital and present themselves, to satisfy their country’s sincere feelings of admiration.”¹

Thus the emperor set in motion one of the most intriguing episodes of East-West relations in premodern history. The little-known Dutch embassy of 1795 was the last European delegation to be received in the traditional Chinese imperial court. The next imperial-level diplomatic audiences wouldn't occur until after the Opium War of 1839–1842, when China was forced to sign a series of infamous Unequal Treaties.

Oddly, however, this Dutch mission has been largely forgotten. There are no book-length studies and few articles about it in any language.² It rarely appears in textbooks, and some scholars of Qing history even seem unaware that it occurred.³ I myself—trained as a historian of Ming and Qing China—knew virtually nothing about it until I began research for this book, even though I'm also an expert in Dutch history and have written about Dutch diplomacy in Asia.⁴

How surprised I was, then, to find out not just how important the mission was in its day, but also that it left troves of documentation in Dutch, French, Spanish, Chinese, and Korean sources. As I began exploring these rich records, I discovered that the story is dramatic, with colorful characters, a harrowing voyage, and interpersonal intrigue, all set against a fascinating backdrop: China was about to erupt into rebellion, while in Europe, French armies were marching on Amsterdam. I realized it would make a compelling narrative history.

But *The Last Embassy* is intended as more than an immersive story. The Dutch mission of 1795 also offers new perspectives on eighteenth-century China and Sino-Western relations, helping us step decisively beyond the culture-clash narrative that still pervades our understanding both in China and the West. That's because, in contrast to other embassies from this period, the Dutch embassy was successful. The Qianlong emperor was delighted with it, granting favors and access never extended to other European envoys.⁵ The ambassador and his bosses felt they had achieved a triumph, especially compared to what had happened to British ambassador George Macartney two years previously.

Lord Macartney's mission to China is as famous as the Dutch embassy is neglected, and it had a very different outcome. Its failure is one reason that historians came to view the history of Sino-Western diplomacy as a culture clash.

Macartney arrived in China in 1793, bringing expensive gifts, a huge cortège of artists, scientists, and musicians, and a list of bold proposals that would, he felt, help place Britain and China in a mutually beneficial relationship: two great powers working together. But the emperor and his court didn't trust Macartney, who refused to

carry out the requisite kowtow bows and made extravagant requests. They were concerned because the British had a reputation as an aggressive people, who attacked and pillaged in the Western Oceans and, quite possibly, near the land borders of the Great Qing itself.⁶ They decided to dismiss Macartney early and get him out of China as soon as possible. His lordship returned to England with little to show for his efforts but a couple imperious letters to his king.

Although Macartney tried to put a brave face on it, he and others in his entourage felt humiliated. Stung by criticism in Europe, they increasingly blamed their failure on the Qing court, which they portrayed as arrogant and inflexible, blind to Britain's virtues.⁷ Such arguments were echoed by other British thinkers and politicians, and after further failed attempts at diplomacy, many in Britain came to feel that China's haughtiness would have to be countered by a show of strength. The Macartney mission became part of a story they told about Chinese intransigence: Because China refused to allow the British to conduct diplomacy based on the natural equality between states, it might well be justified to use military force.⁸

This negative perspective on China not only influenced the British public and British policy makers. It also influenced generations of historians, who came to see the history of Sino-Western interactions as a culture clash. According to this view, the "Chinese World Order" or "tribute system" was incompatible with the Western diplomatic system of independent states. The result, the story goes, was conflict. Europeans, frustrated that they were unable to interact with China on the basis of equality, concluded that China must be brought—forcibly if necessary—into the Western international system, which they conceived to be the natural mode of interstate interaction. This dynamic supposedly helped lead to the bitter Sino-European conflicts of the nineteenth century: the Opium War, the Arrow War, the Sino-French War, and the Boxer Rebellion, among others.⁹ Western and Chinese scholars argued that Qing inflexibility was one of the major reasons for China's tumultuous and bloody nineteenth century.

More recently, historians have challenged this narrative, pointing out that Qing rulers were more pragmatic and cosmopolitan than previously assumed; that relations with maritime Europeans were guided by *realpolitik*; and that even in the West, diplomacy was less "modern" and "Westphalian" than widely portrayed, being heavily influenced by extra-European diplomatic practices.¹⁰

Yet the culture-clash narrative remains deeply rooted in textbooks and scholarly works alike, for one main reason: The British encounter with China was, ultimately, a clash, and the British experience has overwhelmingly dominated the literature on Sino-European

relations.¹¹ Scholars have paid much less attention to non-British diplomacy in China, particularly for the late 1700s and early 1800s, when the British were sending their failed missions.

The Dutch mission of 1795 is one of the most significant counterexamples to British diplomacy during this period and can help us deepen our understanding of Sino-Western relations, but it has not just been neglected; it has been misunderstood. Authors tend to portray it as a failure even more humiliating than the Macartney mission, writing, for example, that it was “catastrophic,” that the Dutch were received in a “distant, scornful, and haughty manner,” that they were “treated as freaks of nature,” that they were forced to prostrate themselves over and over again “under the threat of the whip,” or “dragged and whipped in very public settings.”¹²

This is all, as a Dutch historian has put it, “nonsense.”¹³ Sources from multiple perspectives leave no doubt that the Dutch were received warmly. The ambassador, Isaac Titsingh, himself felt he had achieved a major success, as did his bosses, who made clear that he’d ably fulfilled the goal assigned to him. It is true that the embassy didn’t have grand aims or result in any treaty or agreement: Its main purpose was to congratulate the emperor on reaching his sixtieth year on the throne and thereby strengthen ties of amity between the Dutch and the Qing. But it is odd that so many scholars have insisted that it was a humiliating failure when it was clearly not.

So why has the mission been maligned? The main reason is that it doesn’t fit the culture-clash narrative. The negative portrayal started with George Macartney’s house manager, John Barrow, who spent sixteen pages of his bestseller, *Travels in China*, attacking the Dutch mission.¹⁴ His main claim was that although the Dutch kowtowed whenever asked to do so, their complaisance did no good, and they were deliberately humiliated by a Chinese court intent on holding itself above Europeans. Indeed, he argued, Dutch compliance only encouraged Chinese arrogance. “A tone of submission,” he wrote, “and a tame and passive obedience to the degrading demands of this haughty court serve only to feed its pride, and add to the absurd notions of its own vast importance.”¹⁵ Perhaps Macartney failed in his aims, but at least his firmness forced the Chinese to recognize that the British were superior to themselves, even if they would never admit it.¹⁶

Barrow’s became the most accepted interpretation of the Dutch mission, with modern scholars parroting his claims. For instance, the author of the most widely read account of the Macartney mission wrote, “Both embassies, the British and the Dutch, ended in failure, the former with dignity, the latter in humiliation.”¹⁷

Barrow didn't have access to the sorts of sources that modern scholars do, and we can't expect everyone to read sources in Chinese and Dutch, but what's surprising is that even scholars who could do so, and who were therefore aware that the Dutch mission was received graciously, nonetheless viewed it as a failure. They portrayed the Dutch as victims who were unaware of their role as "tribute" ambassadors in a Sinocentric imperial charade.¹⁸ They suggested that the Dutch should have refused to kowtow and instead insisted on equality, to help teach the Chinese that they couldn't continue holding such a high opinion of themselves.¹⁹

Yet the Dutch ambassador was aware of his role in the Qing court and understood the ideals and practices of East Asian diplomacy. Isaac Titsingh was a scholar of Japan who had led two embassies to Edo to kowtow before the shogun. He knew that diplomacy in East Asia was less about making requests or talking about "business" than about rituals of interrelation.

In this, he wasn't unique among his countrymen. The Dutch were deeply enmeshed in the East Asian world and generally played by its rules. That hadn't always been the case. In the early 1600s, when the Dutch East India Company was young, it erupted into the China Seas, cannons blazing, and demanded trade privileges. When its leaders didn't get what they wanted, they attacked. Officials of the Ming dynasty (1368–1644) fought back, defeating the company in a series of engagements on and near the Chinese coast.²⁰ Chastened, the Dutch settled into a more docile role and were rewarded by Chinese trade, which flowed to their Asian outposts.²¹ When the Ming dynasty was replaced by the Qing dynasty (1644–1911), the Dutch were the first Westerners to have an embassy received in the imperial court, and the Dutch ambassador raised no objections to kowtowing.²² Two more Dutch embassies were received in the court before 1700, each one engaging in the standard rituals. The Dutch East India Company made fortunes trading with China.

The Dutch were also tamed in Japan, where the company encountered the formidable Tokugawa shogunate. There, too, the company had at first acted aggressively, and there, too, it had been forced into a docile role, sending a yearly embassy to kowtow to the shogun, just as Japanese lords did.²³ As in China, good behavior paid off. The Dutch were the only Westerners allowed to trade in Japan, a lucrative market.

At the same time, the Dutch ran an Asian court of their own in their colonial capital of Batavia (present-day Jakarta, Indonesia). They received delegates from throughout Asia and as far away as Africa, adopting the practices and trappings of Southeast and East

Asian diplomacy, such as parasols and parades of elephants. As historian Leonard Blussé has noted, “the Batavian government found its place among Asian rulers and learned to play by the rules of what it then observed to be prevailing Asian diplomatic etiquette and protocol. The Dutch colonizers literally had to invent ‘oriental’ ritual to stay in tune with existing conventions for carrying out foreign intercourse at a diplomatic level.”²⁴

In this way, the Dutch came to understand and generally, accept what Blussé calls “Oriental Diplomacy.”²⁵ They grasped that international relations in East Asia were governed by different ideals. Relations were explicitly hierarchical; embassies were sent less to negotiate than to congratulate or celebrate; and interactions were usually guided by rituals, many of which were based on ancient Chinese tradition.

The Dutch weren’t alone in accommodating themselves to non-Westphalian diplomacy. Scholars of the New Diplomatic History have pointed out that the European diplomatic system in the late eighteenth century and the early nineteenth was still far more ad hoc and unsystematic than has long been believed, and that Europeans frequently engaged in multiple types of diplomatic practice.²⁶ Even the British had a basic grasp of East Asian protocols.²⁷

In any case, Titsingh and his fellow travelers accepted Qing etiquette and proved adept at negotiating court interactions. They also proved adept at recording their experiences. Their detailed writings, combined with a range of other rich sources, open a unique perspective on eighteenth-century China. Indeed, the sources are so vivid that I found I could write immersively, and I adopted a narrative microhistorical approach. Microhistory typically focuses on minor events or “little people,” those usually omitted from the historical record. The main people in this book are wealthy and privileged men—European, Chinese, Manchu—and the embassy is not a minor episode. Yet I am drawn to the little human dramas embedded in the larger story: fears, worries, frustration, humor, and petty disagreements. Maybe it doesn’t matter to the history of Sino-Western relations that when young members of the expedition skated on North Lake in Beijing they preferred European to Manchu skates, or that they were terrified of crossing bridges without railings, but these minutiae paint a more vivid picture and help us imagine what it was like to live and travel in eighteenth-century China.

I found myself writing in the present tense, because it seemed to provide a sense of immediacy and intimacy but also, oddly, of distance.²⁸ The past tense sounds authoritative: things happened this way. The present tense makes more apparent the historian’s act of

imagining, of conjuring a past world from historical sources. But I did not let my imagination overwhelm the facts. I tried to document every detail. The trick was to allow the sources to occupy my imagination, to find the particulars that might bring a scene alive, and somehow the present tense made it easier to do that.

At the heart of any good story are intriguing characters. One of my mentors, Jonathan Spence, once said that among the most interesting people are those with obsessions. This book is full of such people.

The ambassador, Isaac Titsingh, was obsessed by Japan. He kept full-sized Japanese dolls and gazed at maps of Hirado to make himself feel better. He could read and write Japanese, and unlike other Western ambassadors to China, he had studied Chinese. For his entire life, post-embassy, he worked on a detailed volume about Japan, writing his own French, Dutch, and English versions, but was so obsessive about getting everything right that it wasn't published until well after he died, and then only in part. He himself became an object of obsession, most notably for Dutch scholar Frank Lequin, who devoted his scholarly life to trying to track down every letter, note, and scrap of paper written by or to the ambassador. Lequin even cleared away the mud and roots from Titsingh's neglected grave in Père Lachaise Cemetery in Paris.²⁹

The deputy ambassador, Everardus van Braam Houckgeest, was equally obsessed, but in his case, the object was China. A grandiose man, who thought of himself as a genius and made his huge fortune in suspicious ways, he bankrupted himself building a huge collection of Chinese art and artifacts and displaying it in a mansion he called "China Retreat."

Translator Chrétien-Louis-Joseph de Guignes was obsessed with his own status, constantly irritated that he wasn't treated better. He even refused to call himself a translator, a position he felt was beneath his dignity, even though that was his official role. He's great company for a historian—his observations are sharp, bitter, and funny.³⁰

On the Qing side, the most important figure is the Qianlong emperor, without whom there would have been no embassy. He, like Guignes, was obsessed with his own worth, and he, too, is good company. Censorious and vain, he was also erudite and thoughtful, a lover of poetry, and a kind and generous host, at least to the Dutch.

Others in his court also play important roles, such as Heshen, his gouty-footed right-hand man, who was deeply corrupt (he would later be forced to commit suicide for his crimes) but also clever and charismatic. He received the visitors graciously, arranging tours of

places no other European delegates had ever seen. Far to the south, Changlin, the garrulous viceroy of Guangdong and Guangxi, set the whole mission in motion in hopes of satisfying the emperor's desire for a proper celebration of his reaching his sixtieth year of reign. He, too, was gracious, helping compose diplomatic letters and purchase appropriate gifts.³¹

These powerful and privileged men dominate the narrative, as they dominated their societies, but the records tell us about many other people: porters who carried the heavy gifts for the emperor; farmers who helped out with torches or watched from hiding places in the bamboo or from the backs of buffalos; elegant women who traveled in carts and stared with open curiosity; a functionary in Beijing who woke the travelers each day far too early with his loud yelling; Korean ambassadors who wrote poems about the travelers and gave them medicine; the young Frenchman Mr. Agie, who climbed onto a roof to retrieve a ball and stood for too long looking down at some ladies. The records are full of encounters—irritating, angry, baffling, heartwarming, funny—each one a glimpse of humans who lived and died long ago but whose feelings and experiences were as real as ours today.

But what came to obsess me most as I worked on this book was China itself. The travelers got to know eighteenth-century China intimately, and so did I, as I retraced their route northward along the Pearl River, through the Meiling Pass, along the Zhang River, through the frightening Eighteen Cataracts, and so on, hour by hour, day by day, struggling to find Chinese names to match the poor French and Dutch transliterations, which were themselves based on eighteenth-century Cantonese and Mandarin oral Chinese. Thanks to beautiful, detailed Qing maps, I was able to plot their course, and I came to appreciate the Qing dynasty's transportation and communication systems, so different from European ones.

The travelers followed an unusual route.³² Whereas most travelers went through the lower Yangtze region, floating comfortably along rivers and canals almost all the way to Beijing, Titsingh and his companions were taken directly northward, mostly overland. This was faster—the emperor wanted them to arrive in Beijing in time for the New Year's celebrations—but much harder. They trudged through some of the poorest parts of the empire during the coldest part of winter, encountering blizzards, icestorms, freezing winds, and slippery cliffs.



MAP 1 The Qing Empire, circa 1795. *Source:* Cox Cartographic, Ltd.



MAP 2 Dutch embassy's journey from Canton to Beijing and back, 1794–1795. *Source:* Cox Cartographic, Ltd.

Horses and draft animals were much rarer in China than in Europe, and Titsingh and Van Braam were carried most of the way in palanquins. These conveyances were comfortable but required human porters, who had a tendency to run away when paid too little, leaving their cargo on the road in the snow. Lesser-ranked members of the party, such as Guignes, were often urged to ride in carts, which they

hated, feeling that they were no better than country hay-wagons: hard wheels on hard axles administering hard jolts. He and his comrades usually asked for horses but then complained that their mounts were emaciated and stubborn, leading Guignes to compare himself to Don Quixote on his steed Rocinante.³³

Moreover, since this wasn't the usual route for important people, accommodations were poor, and the travelers' huge train (it took more than a thousand porters to carry the luggage, kitchen implements, and presents) became scattered. Bedding and underwear lagged behind. Presents got smashed. Horses died. Porters froze to death.

Yet even in the harsh winter, when the trees were bare and the north wind threw itself across the frozen plains, there were sights to distract the travelers: strange tombs, mysterious towers, vast lakes, unexpected vistas over hidden valleys. It's easy to forget how intimate travel was when it took twenty or thirty minutes to go a mile and one had to cross rivers by ford or ferry. The clothes and languages of the people watching from fields or doorways changed county by county, prefecture by prefecture, province by province, and the landscape changed, too, from the subtropical mountains of Guangdong to the dusty reaches of the North China Plain.

The landscape was, of course, very different from that of China today, and not just because of twentieth- and twenty-first-century deforestation and urbanization. The great Yellow River itself moved, changing its course in the 1850s in a series of floods that killed more than a million people. This transformed the geography in northern China. When the voyagers crossed the Yellow River, they did so at a point far south of its current course.

So this book is about more than an embassy. It's about a series of encounters. On the most concrete level, it describes the encounters the travelers had with the people, institutions, customs, technologies, and landscapes of China. But it also explores the encounters between their ideas of China—often taken from European books—and the reality that met them every step of the way. For instance, they carried with them an edition of a famous book by Johan Nieuhof, who accompanied a Dutch embassy to Beijing a century and a half previously, and whose account was renowned not just for its vivid prose but also for its rich illustrations.³⁴ They compared their own impressions to his, updating, correcting, and making their own sketches.

Even more importantly, they compared their experiences to the writings of European missionaries in Beijing, whose thousands of pages of observations were published in handsome volumes that were

read throughout Europe, influencing philosophers, ministers, and princes.³⁵ These dispatches tended to be positive, describing China's wise moral philosophy, enlightened government, meritocratic bureaucracy, flourishing agriculture, prosperous cities, and magnificent roads and canals. Although the missionary reports persuaded many philosophers, such as Voltaire, who wrote that China was "the wisest and most ordered nation in the universe,"³⁶ they also prompted criticism. De Guignes's father, the eminent orientalist Joseph de Guignes, believed that the missionaries exaggerated China's antiquity. He himself believed that the Chinese written language was derived from Egyptian hieroglyphics, a position that Titsingh also held for a while. Indeed, the two men were in correspondence, which is one reason Titsingh chose the younger Guignes to accompany him.

The travelers found themselves in an unprecedented position to assess the missionaries' views, particularly since their overland route showed them a China rarely seen by foreigners. They came to feel that the missionaries were wrong to convey such a glowing perspective, but they stopped short of the sort of vitriol spouted by people like Barrow, who wrote, for example, of "the duplicity and knavery of the Chinese, which not only pervade every department of the government, but also, naturally enough, infect the people generally ... progressively descending from the Great Emperor himself downwards to the very lowest official."³⁷

De Guignes the younger challenged such views. "One mustn't judge the customs of another country by those of one's own. Each people has their own, and voyagers must conform to them."³⁸ It's not that he loved China—he could be quite critical. He just felt that the Chinese applied the same standards to themselves as they did to their visitors. If Qing officials sometimes took the best boats or horses for themselves, they at least didn't complain when others did the same. "What can we say to people who treat us as they treat themselves?"³⁹ One had to take China as it was, not as one wished it to be. "I don't admire the Chinese," he wrote, "but I'm impartial, and we shouldn't judge them by our own ideas."⁴⁰ Guignes wasn't always as impartial as he claimed, but these are wise words. Unfortunately, they were largely forgotten, whereas Barrow's perspectives spread, and negative and dismissive views of China became nearly ubiquitous in the nineteenth-century Anglophone world and beyond.⁴¹

One reason that his words didn't achieve the readership or influence of British accounts is that the Dutch Republic itself ceased to exist. Even as Van Braam was drinking tea with the emperor at a party, French troops were marching on Amsterdam. The successor to

the United Provinces of the Netherlands, the Batavian Republic, was a French puppet state. This meant that the Dutch were now at war with Great Britain, which seized Dutch ships and territories, leaving the Dutch in China with no funds even to buy daily necessities. It wasn't long before the Dutch East India Company itself was abolished. In the meantime, China was beset by rebellions, and the old emperor, who had treated the emissaries so well, relinquished his throne to his son, who had great trouble restoring control. Peace returned to China around the same time it returned to Europe, but by then, the world had changed irrevocably. The promising relations established during the embassy were never pursued.

Therefore, Guignes's book about the Dutch voyage didn't achieve anything close to the influence of British accounts, which became bestsellers in multiple languages, while his was never translated into English.⁴² Van Braam also wrote a book about the voyage, which was highly laudatory of China and the Chinese. Although it sold better than Guignes's, being translated into English, German, Danish, and Dutch (the original was in French), those editions were incomplete pirated editions that focused on the most difficult and unpleasant parts of the voyage and left out many of the good parts. As for Titsingh's measured and detailed account, it wasn't published until 2005, thanks to the work of Frank Lequin, who created a beautiful, well-annotated edition.⁴³ Unfortunately, it remains accessible only to people who read Dutch. The British accounts, in contrast, have been published, republished, translated, excerpted, and assigned as textbook readings, even in China, where various Chinese translations are available. No account of the Dutch voyage has been translated into Chinese.⁴⁴

Back in Europe, few publishers were interested in putting out works about a diplomatic mission sent by a defunct company representing a state that no longer existed. So the writings by members of the Dutch mission, with their relatively nonjudgmental views, their descriptions of the kind interactions with imperial officials, the receptions they received in Beijing, the parties, temple tours, and visits to the emperor's own living quarters—all were forgotten. Instead, their mission was portrayed as part of a "clash of cultures," a centuries-long war for diplomatic precedence, in which China was eventually taught humility and brought, forcibly, into the modern diplomatic order.

That culture-clash narrative deserves to be balanced by other narratives, and this one begins in March, 1794, in the Forbidden City, where an old emperor worries about the future.

CHAPTER ONE

The Center

Beijing, Early 1794

The emperor is the pivot around which everything turns. Today he's holding court in the Forbidden City, but to get there, you have to pass through walls. As you approach Beijing, you can see them looming over the plain, crowned by many-storied gatehouses with curved roofs and rows of black windows. If allowed through the cavernous port, you'll find yourself in the Outer City, also known as the Chinese City. Follow this wide street, but be careful not to lose your place, because it's so crowded that you'll have to stand to the side until you can seize an opening and rejoin the press of humanity. At least the shuffling bodies offer relief against the bitter wind, which drives dust over everything, forcing shopkeepers to pull tarps over their hanging ducks. The dromedaries are lucky to be able to squeeze their nostrils shut. Maybe you want to keep yours open, to smell the dumplings and the incense from temples.

After an hour—and perhaps a dumpling or two—you reach the next set of walls, equally massive. If you have the right credentials, you're allowed into the Inner City, also called the Manchu City, because it was designated for families of the Qing conquerors of China. The roads are better paved but still dusty and busy. Every so often an ornate palanquin appears, carrying someone important, and people have to step out of its way and wait for it to pass.

But maybe you are one of these important people—a noblewoman, a dignitary, a high official. Maybe your palanquin even

has a little wood stove, like the emperor's, so you're cozy under your fox fur blanket. With servants to clear the way, you make rapid progress and are soon waved through another set of walls and into the imperial city.

It's less crowded here, with fewer shops. Brick walls are interrupted by an occasional grand gateway. If a gate is open, you might catch a glimpse of children chasing one another under lanterns left over from New Year's. Soon you're granted access through another wall and into the imperial park, where the wind hisses across frozen lakes: North Lake, Middle Lake, South Lake. You'll want to open your curtains wide to look at the famous sites: the Five Dragon Pavilions or the White Pagoda, whose bulbous stupa juts up from the top of Jade Flower Island. Maybe you ask your porters to stop for a moment on Rainbow Bridge to watch Manchu champions skating, their twirling figures reflected in the clear ice, so that they seem like phoenixes flying in the sky.¹

Soon you arrive before the massive walls of the Forbidden City itself, which squat over a wide moat. Now, even you must get out of your palanquin and set foot on the cold flagstones, because beyond this point, only the emperor and a few favored ones are permitted to be carried. If your documents are sound, you're escorted through the long, cavelike entranceway into the Forbidden City.

The Forbidden City is a warren of courtyards laid out on a divine axis. The largest courtyards contain grand temple-like halls where the emperor presides over banquets, audiences, and ceremonies. The rites and sacrifices he performs are a key part of his job, because he's the prime intermediary between heaven and earth. When you meet him—if you're so lucky—his dragon throne will stand to the north, like the ever-constant pole-star, and you'll approach from the south, kneeling and touching your head to the floor three times and then standing and doing it again and again, three times three.

Each year a thousand ten thousands kowtow to him this way. Most do so far beyond the walls of Beijing, in the cities and towns of the provinces, prefectures, and counties, where his golden tablets are displayed in the temple-like offices of local ministers. But the lucky ones do it here in person, at one of the many halls and palaces. These fortunate people tend to be ministers, officials, princes, or nobles from the vast empire: Chinese, Mongols, Tibetans, and Turks. But each year, visitors also come from beyond the borders. Ever since the ancient kings accepted the obeisance of the people of the four directions, foreigners have come to take part in the harmonizing rites. This is how the earthly realm is ordered.

The current occupant of the dragon throne has been carrying out

his duties for fifty-nine years, and the weight of office shows. His eighty-three-year-old eyes are so wrinkled he has to lift his head to see from beneath the drooping lids. His shoulders ache, and he can't draw a bow. He can walk but needs help climbing stairs. He has trouble sleeping. He can't hear well. He's forgetful.²

His reign is one of the longest ever recorded, and one of the most prosperous, but lately he's been worried. There are rumblings of rebellion, reports of strange teachers spreading dangerous ideas, complaints about dishonest officials bullying the people, news of robbers robbing and pirates pillaging. Most troubling, the rains and snows haven't come to the capital since last year.³

This may be a sign of heaven's disapproval, and who else is there to blame but him? As he frequently points out, he's never ceased to work tirelessly for the well-being of his subjects, carrying out the rites and prayers and sacrifices, reading memorials and issuing edicts, punishing the wicked and rewarding the good. But perhaps there's something to reproach in his conduct?

Maybe, he feels, he's wrong to have scheduled a party. Next New Year's Day will mark the beginning of his sixtieth year on the throne, and princes, dukes, and ministers from throughout the realm and beyond have begged him to hold a national celebration. Of course, every New Year's is celebrated with two weeks of banquets, fireworks, acrobatics, plays, concerts, wrestling displays, and ice-skating competitions. But his subjects say next year's festivities should be grander. After all, an emperor reigning for a full sixty-year calendrical cycle is a rare and wondrous thing. He has ruled as long as any other emperor in the thousands of years of recorded history, a clear sign of heaven's blessing.

He loves celebrations, especially when they focus on him and his many accomplishments, so he initially agreed to the proposals. After all, how could he deny his subjects' heartfelt wishes? But now he wonders whether such a celebration might manifest arrogance or self-satisfaction. It is especially troubling that a solar eclipse will occur right on New Year's Day next year. Eclipses have been seen from time immemorial as warnings from heaven, and this one will be followed just two weeks later by a lunar eclipse, which will coincide with the second most important day of the New Year's season—the Lantern Festival.

He acknowledges that solar and lunar trajectories and their resulting eclipses are in the category of things that have been determined for thousands of years, recalling the words of the ancient sage Mencius, who said, "Despite the height of heaven and the distance of the stars, one can calculate the solstice of a thousand

years in the future while sitting in his seat if one has apprehended the underlying principles.”⁴ Still, it’s highly unusual for two eclipses to occur during the first month of a lunar year.

The emperor decides to be cautious. “This is a clear portent,” he proclaims, “a warning sign descending from heaven.”⁵ He declares that no grand celebration must take place:

The capital has not obtained any auspicious snow since the beginning of winter last year, and up to today there still has not been any significant precipitation or rain. I long for moisture. Worried and worn down, I have been praying devoutly and piously and carrying out sacrifices, but still we’ve not received any precipitation. Enquiring into the reasons for this, it might be precisely this desire to allow the carrying out of a great celebration. Already, this borders on egotism and self satisfaction, ... but next New Year’s solar and lunar eclipse events make it impossible not to feel all the more a sense of fearful admonition and to reflect urgently and examine one’s conscience. The great celebration ceremony for next year—it seems evident that it’s not really necessary to hold it.⁶

He orders his ministers and officials to refrain from asking again for an anniversary celebration. In this way, perhaps heaven will bring succor “so that the districts of the common people will all increase in happiness and well-being. This is, in any case, my great wish, although I don’t dare to suggest that it must be so.”⁷ He reassures his subjects that his decision doesn’t foreclose the possibility of future festivities, and he suggests the following New Year, when he plans to abdicate and let his son take the throne, another rare and wondrous event.

The edict ends as edicts do: “Let this order be known.” But the Great Qing is unimaginably vast, stretching from the far Western oases of Turkmenistan to the Yellow Sea, from the tundra of northern Mongolia to the tropical beaches of Hainan Island, from the highest mountains of Tibet to the river ports of the Lower Yangtze, and its people are multitudinous and diverse. How can one make certain that the emperor’s words are understood throughout the realm?

The answer is that the empire is held together not just by armies, officials, and legal codes, but by ritual. Of the six boards of government, the Board of Rites plays a central role. Rites organize the hierarchical relationship of all imperial subjects, and even those from beyond the borders. They are, as a historian has recently written, “the foundation of the Qing political system.”⁸

The Board of Rites is responsible for promulgating imperial edicts, which it does via a series of ceremonies designed to extend the emperor’s sacred presence into the farthest reaches of the realm. The

process begins in the Forbidden City, where an edict is placed on an altar in the Hall of Great Harmony. High officials kowtow to it, and then one of them raises it up and gives it to another official, usually a President of the Board of Rites, who receives it with hands above his head. The president carries it down three flights of marble stairs to the vast paved courtyard below, where he places it on another altar, kowtows, pauses, lifts it again, and then, standing up, sets it on a lacquered tray. A canopy is raised over it, and the tray is carried southward through the Forbidden City, accompanied by a retinue of officials carrying flags, umbrellas, and instruments. At the southern gate of the Forbidden City, the Meridian Gate, the edict is placed in a special palanquin carved with dragons. It is kowtowed to again and then carried, incense wafting, through long paved courtyards southward beyond the Forbidden City to the Gate of Heavenly Peace, the main gateway between the Imperial City and the Inner City of Beijing.

Here, the edict is proclaimed from the top of the walls. Below, on the other side of the five marble bridges that span the Golden Water River, officials kneel and listen, and then they kowtow, heads touching the paving stones.⁹ The edict is lowered from the gate, placed on the dragon palanquin, and carried across the central bridge—the Dragon Bridge—to the Board of Rites Building, accompanied by music and incense.¹⁰ Here it's placed on another altar and kowtowed to. Not all edicts receive such attention, but all of the emperor's official communications involve this sort of ritual theater.

The officers of the Board of Rites are tasked with printing edicts so they can be sent out to the provinces and prefectures, where they'll be received in musical processions, displayed on altars, kowtowed to, and proclaimed out loud. In this way, the emperor's sacred authority is felt even in the farthest reaches.¹¹

Yet it takes time for the emperor's orders to travel. An edict must be painstakingly carved into woodblocks, each character in reverse, and then printed, after which it must travel in multiple copies through the empire, post station to post station, canal lock to river port. By early April, a month after the edict is proclaimed in the Forbidden City, it seems that it still hasn't reached the great southern city of Canton, which is how the Dutchman Everardus van Braam Houckgeest gets a chance to go to Beijing.

CHAPTER TWO

The Amateur

Canton, April 1794

Everardus van Braam Houckgeest is an *amateur* of China, in the original sense of the word: a lover and collector of all things Chinese. His connection to the celestial empire goes back decades, ever since he first sailed for the Far East in 1758 as a teenager. China made his fortune, and when he returned to Europe fifteen years later, he was rich. Unfortunately, he's not wise. As his estranged older brother puts it, "he's gifted in intelligence but constantly makes himself miserable with his unforgivable bull-headedness."¹ He spent his fortune on an expensive house in the Netherlands, sold it, bought a dairy operation, sold it, bought a plantation in America, sold it, fled back to Europe, and then, beset by creditors (including his brother), decided to return to China to restore his fortunes.

Now he's director of the Dutch East India Company's office in the City of Canton, the only port in China where people from the Western Oceans are allowed to trade. He and his comrades reside in a stately lodge here on the boat-stuffed river. It's the second-nicest lodge in this row of buildings. It used to be the best, but now the British one is better. The British dominate the trade, because the Dutch East India Company, once the greatest maritime power in Asia, has fallen on hard times. Its decline is due partly to the British themselves, who defeated the Dutch Republic in a global war ten years ago.

When Van Braam returned to Canton in 1790, he was surprised how much less money one could make than before and complained

bitterly about his low commissions, saying that he would never have abandoned his American plantations if he'd known how bad things were.² But he's a resourceful man. By cultivating relationships with the Chinese and Americans, he's found ways to make so much money in such a short amount of time that his bosses suspect him of misconduct. He fiercely denies such charges, angry at the "hidden pens and tongues" that have besmirched his honor and character.³ If he's concealed some transactions and decisions in his secret drawer instead of copying them into the standard record books and general reports, this is only to protect the reputations of other members of the lodge, who are constantly quarreling among themselves. He himself has nothing to hide. "My conduct has been irreproachable, as has my way of life here, at least so far as this country permits."⁴

He's fascinated by this country and is spending his wealth to build a huge collection—a sort of virtual China—so that when he returns to the West, he can showcase the riches of this great civilization, which he believes has so much to teach the world. The heart of his collection is a growing set of maps and paintings he's commissioning from Chinese artists, who can travel where he can't. They depict not just the famous sights of China, but also Chinese boats, bridges, buildings, silkmaking techniques, and everything else he can imagine might be of interest to people back home. A man who can bring treasures and curiosities back will naturally enjoy renown and recognition.

If only he could travel more widely to see things for himself. But China's laws keep Europeans out. He's not even allowed to enter Canton's massive gates except under very rare circumstances. He used to climb the mountain behind the city and picnic near a beautiful pagoda under the trees, gazing down over the walls at the temples and offices, or out across the countryside, where the river shimmers below, filled with boats. On a clear day, you could see all the way to the green hills of Whampoa Island, ten miles away, where Western ships dock. Now even that small pleasure has been taken away.⁵

The only Westerners allowed to stay in China's interior are missionaries, who have made homes in Beijing and a few other places. The letters they send back, published in massive volumes, are read throughout Europe and its dependencies, and they've intrigued great minds of the Enlightenment—Voltaire, Leibnitz, Wolff, Franklin, Jefferson. Yet the missionaries generally renounce any right to return to their own countries.

The only legal way for a nonmissionary to travel in China is to accompany a diplomatic delegation to Beijing, but in the two

centuries since Dutch ships first arrived in the Far East, only three Dutch embassies have been received in the imperial capital, the last one more than a hundred years ago. The Portuguese sent four embassies. The Russians sent a half dozen, depending on what you call an embassy. The British sent just one disastrous one. Participants in these missions became famous afterward, their books read in many languages.

Van Braam has been urging his superiors to send a mission to Beijing, saying that with the British increasingly trying to dominate China's foreign trade, the Dutch should establish a relationship with the emperor and remind him of the long friendship between their two countries.⁶ His bosses have demurred, ignoring his warnings about the devious and greedy British.

But today, opportunity knocks. A group of Chinese visitors appears at the lodge. He can tell that this is no ordinary visit, because among them is the county magistrate, a man who doesn't often venture to the Western lodges.⁷ Usually, contact between Europeans and Qing officials is mediated by the so-called Hang merchants, who are the only people Westerners are allowed to trade with. Europeans must have a Hang merchant vouch for them, and if they misbehave or if he can't pay the requisite tolls and taxes, he can be imprisoned and his family ruined. Today, the Hang merchant Monqua accompanies the magistrate and his suite.⁸ Van Braam knows him well. It's said that he tried to commit suicide because he's so overleveraged, owing money to Europeans on one side and to the inland tea merchants on the other, not to mention the bribes he must pay to imperial officials.⁹ Recently, Van Braam has persuaded him to take on the debts of another Hang merchant who went bankrupt, plunging poor Monqua into even greater arrears.¹⁰

The magistrate informs Van Braam that he has come on behalf of the most powerful official in the region: the Imperial Viceroy Changlin (長麟), a man who rules over an area larger than most European countries and a population twice that of England.¹¹ The viceroy wonders whether the Dutch might be willing to send a deputation to Beijing in the coming year to congratulate the emperor on the sixtieth year of his reign. Monqua and the magistrate make clear how momentous this occasion is. A reign this long is a wondrous thing.

They tell Van Braam that the English are willing to send a delegate, as are the Portuguese of Macau. Since the Dutch Republic is one of the oldest Western countries recognized by the Great Qing, it would please the viceroy if the company would send someone. In fact, they say, it would be possible for Van Braam himself to serve as

ambassador, so long as he's equipped with proper documents from his superiors.¹²

Van Braam is delighted and declares that he'll write at once to his bosses and urge them to say yes.

"How long," the magistrate asks, "will it take to receive an answer?"

"Five months," says Van Braam.

The county magistrate urges Van Braam to write as quickly and compellingly as possible. Van Braam promises that he will.

After drinking some South African wine, the guests leave, pressing him again to write to his bosses immediately.¹³

He does, employing his considerable powers of persuasion.

"To the Venerable and Powerful Gentlemen, Commissioners-General of the Administration of the Affairs of the East Indies, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera," he writes. "On the second day of this month, I received an unexpected visit."¹⁴ He describes the conversation, explaining that next year the emperor will embark on his sixtieth year of rule and "all of the court will go to Beijing to congratulate the sovereign."¹⁵ It will be, he says, "a glorious festival," and the imperial viceroy wants the Dutch there.¹⁶

He points out what a tremendous opportunity is being offered: a chance to forge strong relations with the imperial court. He says that the viceroy himself has made clear that he understands that "the Dutch have always been the oldest friends of the Chinese."¹⁷

Knowing that the company is short of cash, he promises that the mission needn't be expensive, reminding his bosses that it's customary for the Chinese to pay for an ambassador's travel and upkeep during his long voyage. As for presents for the emperor, they don't need to be extremely valuable, so long as they suit the taste of the nation: printed fabrics, textiles, large mirrors, watches, clocks, pearls, or amber.¹⁸ Most of these things can be purchased right here in Canton or in nearby Macau.

Indeed, he says, if his bosses would like to save even more money, they can choose him as ambassador, and they needn't pay him any kind of special salary. He says he's not making this offer out of vanity or pride, but as "proof of the great passion that continually animates me for the good of the company."¹⁹ Of course, he'd need a more elevated title, "so that my mission will appear in the eyes of the Chinese and the foreign nations of greater importance."²⁰

Van Braam is an excellent salesman, and so he adds a classic sales closing touch: a sense of urgency. He tells commissioners that if they miss this opportunity, the Dutch will be left behind, because the British, Spanish, and Portuguese are all planning to send emissaries.

He says the English are sending two supercargos from their lodge here—men whose rank is roughly equivalent to that of Van Braam himself—while the Portuguese are sending an officer or judge from Macao, and the Spanish are likely sending the Spanish chief, a man named Manuel de Agote. Indeed, he writes, the company's resolution to send an embassy is "inevitable ... because three other nations have already adopted it, and among those three are two that are, in regard to their commerce with China, far less important than our company is. The company's reputation and honor demand that the company not appear beneath these other nations on such a public occasion."²¹

This argument is compelling. Unfortunately, it's false. The other Europeans have no plans to send emissaries. It's true that Monqua and the county magistrate *asked* the British chief, Mr. Henry Browne, to send someone, but Browne deliberately made no promises. He said that if it was truly the viceroy's wish, it was certainly not out of the question that a British emissary might be sent to participate in the emperor's sixtieth-year celebrations.²² But one must know how to read between the lines when talking to the British. As Browne would later write, "[my] promise as far as relating to the English Factory was only eventual and depending on the viceroy's future dispositions. ... I therefore did not take any step in consequence of it nor had I any intention of so doing till I should receive a second application."²³ Van Braam doesn't bother to check with Mr. Browne before composing his letter to Batavia, perhaps because he's been frustrated lately by British "unpoliteness."²⁴

As for his assurances about the Spanish and Portuguese, those seem to be completely fabricated. He certainly knows that the Spanish don't have any firm plans, because he himself was supposed to ask the Spanish chief, Agote, to send an emissary. Van Braam did immediately send a letter to Agote in Macau, but he didn't wait for a reply before sending his letter to Batavia.²⁵ He would receive that reply—a negative one—later.

In any case, when he dispatches the letter to Batavia, Van Braam doesn't know for sure that the Spanish—or the British or the Portuguese—are sending anyone, and yet he makes it seem as though all the other Europeans are committed to the sixtieth-year anniversary and even adds specific details—the British are sending supercargos, the Portuguese are sending a judge, the Spanish are sending their chief—that he seems to have made up out of thin air.

This kind of exaggeration, this stretching of the truth, is a pattern for Van Braam, and in this case, as so often in his life, it works, but only partly.

His bosses do decide to send an embassy to China, but since they

don't trust Van Braam, they only name him deputy ambassador, without any fancy titles or pay raise. Whom do the bosses choose as chief ambassador? Isaac Titsingh, who's quite a different sort of person.

CHAPTER THREE

Man Proposes, God Disposes

Batavia, Isle of Java, June 1794

Everything has a place and a rank in the world. A gentleman like Isaac Titsingh, a member of the Grand Council of the Indies, possesses an honor guard and a grand coach, and his inferiors defer to him—subalterns, servants, and slaves. In the world of nations and peoples, it's the same. In Java, there's a species called the orangutans, who can drink beer from cups. Above them are humans like the Bengalis and Javanese, who Titsingh believes should naturally be ruled by their superiors.¹ Most Europeans think they're at the top of the hierarchy of civilizations, but Titsingh disagrees. Japan is, he believes, "a nation no less civilized than any of the most prominent nations of Europe."²

Titsingh is obsessed with Japan and longs to be able to spend his time writing about it for his fellow Europeans, who know next to nothing about the country. His infatuation began a decade ago, when he directed the Dutch bureau in Nagasaki, and he admits that his obsession borders on the ridiculous:

I feel a sort of reverence when I touch a piece of Japanese paper or something else from Japan. When, in the course of my administrative work in these trying times, I'm overcome by depression because of all the troubles that confront me, I only have to look at an item in my collection,

and in an instant my gloomy thoughts disappear, healing me better than a complete pharmacy can heal a sick person.³

He's considered trying to return to Japan, but that's impossible unless he wants to renew his contract to work for the Dutch East India Company, which he doesn't want to do. He's been at it long enough, for almost three decades—ever since 1766, when he shipped out from Holland as a twenty-one-year-old university graduate. It's not that the company hasn't been good to him. On the contrary. He's amassed recognition and wealth, enjoying a house like a palace, servants to fan and feed him, girls to fill his pipe and attend to his other earthly desires.⁴ But the company has seen better days. Once the richest and strongest power in maritime Asia, it's now in decline. Its capital, Batavia, the "Queen of the East," is depopulated and filled with miasmal vapors. He, too, has caught the Batavian "land-sickness." Feverish, he avoids the incessant parties with their costly imported liquor and long meals and instead holes up in his library with his pipe, gazing at maps and paintings of Japan and thinking of his friends there.⁵ Many have died or lost their positions. His Japanese mistress Okimine, once very young and pretty, has become a drunkard, an angry, fallen woman.⁶

No, it's time for him to quit his job and take his collection back to Europe to complete his manuscripts and translations. He writes to his brother and sisters in Amsterdam, saying how his term of service is nearly up and how he intends to return and meet the nieces and nephews he's read about in letters. He tells them that he knows he could rise further, even to the position of governor-general itself, but he'd rather "spend the few years that remain to me in peace, sacrificing all Indian greatness to my own inner well-being."⁷

Unfortunately, the governor-general doesn't want him to go. "After all," the man says, "what will become of the company if everyone leaves?"⁸ At the very least, the governor-general says, no decision can be made until new commissioners arrive from Europe, who will hopefully restore the company's fortunes. And when the commissioners do arrive, they'll need good people to help them, so he urges Titsingh to think things over.

Titsingh is used to getting his way. He writes to his brother and asks him to find a house for him on one of the best streets in Amsterdam—the Herengracht or the Keizersgracht—and have it furnished in the best manner.⁹ He writes to his British financial agents, telling them he's planning to relocate to London (it's good to keep one's options open these days, when revolutionaries are beheading kings). He cashes out a good part of his fortune and

converts it to English bonds. Better rates can be found elsewhere, but the British offer stability and security. Some of his possessions can't be easily liquidated, such as his mansion in Batavia, foolishly purchased when he first arrived. He decides that he's willing to take a loss to unload it, along with the coach and horses and slaves. Even if he sells all of this for 10,000 piasters, half what he paid, he'll still consider himself lucky. He just wants to go home.

Fortunately, he's managed to avoid other entanglements, such as when his colleagues tried to set him up with the widow Keiser. "I was given flowers," he writes to a friend, "but threw them in the pisspot, so that was clear enough."¹⁰ It's not that he doesn't enjoy women's company. He just prefers to remain unencumbered. "Women's lust for power," he's written, has since time immemorial disturbed the peace of this world.¹¹ Like many colonial bachelors, he openly keeps mistresses, referring, half-jokingly, to his harem. Japanese girls were by far the best, and sometimes he smokes the pipe that his former mistress Okimine gave him and wishes it were still old times, when they drank sake together in Deshima.¹²

His exploits have led to one small entanglement. One of his Bengali "nymphets" bore him a son, William, who's now a toddler. He arranged a legal agreement so that he has custody, but he's kept the boy a secret from his own brother, Jan. Usually his letters to Jan are candid and intimate. Sometimes they're even written with codes to hide the identities of the men they deride. Yet Titsingh has been too ashamed to mention his boy William.¹³ Now it's time for the truth. He tells Jan, asking for forgiveness and help. He hopes to take his son back to Holland, but in case the company refuses to let him leave his post, he would like Jan to oversee the boy's education. He's sure it won't come to that: "Although I am certain that the High Commissioners will try everything they can to keep me here, I am too fully resolved to be dissuaded from my intention to return."¹⁴

Yet, as Titsingh says, "Man proposes; God disposes."¹⁵ Shortly after the new commissioners arrive in Batavia, Van Braam's letter arrives. The commissioners decide to send an embassy to China but don't want Van Braam as ambassador.

There's no better choice than Titsingh, so they try to persuade him. Yes, they know he wants to go home, but isn't this just the sort of opportunity to interest him? Titsingh has even been studying Chinese, which is necessary to be truly literate in Japanese.

To be sure, his Japanese correspondents don't write positively about China or the Chinese. As one of them notes, in broken Dutch (which Titsingh corrects and sends back), "I despise and hate the Chinese, even as I greatly esteem the Dutch, because the Chinese are

always full of fables and miraculous stories of ghosts and dreams that have no basis in reality. They are superstitious and even if they are convinced of a falsehood, they go unashamedly forth and tell it in the open.”¹⁶ The friend is particularly incensed by the way that the Chinese practice historical arrogance, claiming, for instance, that a Japanese monarch was really a Chinese soldier who fled his land and eventually became emperor. “I hope you’ll see from this story their lies,” he writes, “which are so numerous that it’s no longer to be wondered at—it’s their standard practice, a part of their basic character.”¹⁷

Defying expectation, Titsingh doesn’t jump at the chance to go to China. Commissioner Sebastian Cornelius Nederburgh decides it’s time for a talk. It’s evening, when the elite of Batavia indulge in what a British visitor calls a “propensity to indolence and voluptuousness,” drinking large amounts of alcohol imported at tremendous expense—madeira wine, claret, gin, Dutch beer, and English porter—while slaves attend them, carrying silver bowls of rose water to wash hands, towels to dry, and polished brass spittoons.¹⁸

After small talk, Nederburgh gets to the point. He says no one is more qualified to lead an expedition to China than Isaac Titsingh. He points out what a prestigious post it is and how much it will contribute to Titsingh’s reputation. Most of all, he says, the mission is vital to the company’s future.

Titsingh understands. Last year, when the British sent a huge embassy to China, Titsingh met the ambassador, Lord George Macartney, who stopped in Batavia on his way to Beijing. The ambassador showed off his fleet of beautiful ships, which carried a grand entourage of soldiers and scholars and artists, not to mention impressive gifts for the emperor: clocks, telescopes, fine guns, and even a state-of-the-art stagecoach with modern shock absorbers and mechanisms to adjust the seats and raise and lower the curtains and venetian blinds.¹⁹ Titsingh was ill at the time, but because he speaks good English, he was chosen to escort the ambassador and his retinue. He didn’t have much of a chance to get to know Macartney, who excused himself and went back to his flagship to avoid the miasmal vapors, but Titsingh did entertain the other British gentlemen, showing them his maps and manuscripts, his paintings of Japan, and his collection of ancient Asian coins. He even gave young George Staunton, son of the deputy ambassador, a Japanese writing box.²⁰ Young George and his compatriots appreciated Titsingh’s attentions but weren’t impressed by much else. Batavia was, they noted in their journals, a city in decline, its Dutch rulers sybaritic and indolent.

Macartney's mission to China didn't go well. The emperor found the British arrogant, presumptuous, and rude. Macartney and his retinue were hurried out of Beijing with nothing to show for their efforts but a couple of letters and the lifting of tolls on Macartney's flagship.

Nederburgh thinks that Titsingh can succeed where Lord Macartney failed, and he tells Titsingh that the commissioners want him to serve as ambassador so much that they're prepared to offer Titsingh a good deal.

Titsingh negotiates carefully. He says he'll renew his contract only for the length of time that the embassy will take place, and after it's over, he must be allowed to immediately return to Europe, without having to come back to Batavia. Nederburgh agrees. Titsingh also insists that he be allowed to return to Europe on any ship he wants—even a British ship—instead of repatriating on a Dutch vessel. This goes against company policy, but Nederburgh agrees. Titsingh also asks for and receives generous remuneration.

And that's how, instead of returning home, Titsingh finds himself preparing for a trip to Beijing. He sells his estate, his coaches, his horses, and most of his slaves at a sharp loss.²¹ He boxes up his books and writes flurries of letters to set his affairs in order, describing how his fortune should be divided if he dies.

In the meantime, a four-ship fleet is repaired, prepared, and inspected.²² He himself ensures that the ships are well armed against French "pirates," installing special war rockets on them.²³ (The Dutch Republic is at war with France.) He endures a seemingly endless series of goodbye parties, musing that it's a wonder he maintains his health.

Finally, on August 15, 1794, he leaves Batavia accompanied by great fanfare, because the Chinese aren't the only ones who can perform a good ceremony. The Dutch are delighted with political ceremonial, holding frequent parades and processions to honor foreign dignitaries, high officials, and the governor-general.

Titsingh likes to portray himself as a simple man, focused more on scholarship than wealth or power, but he loves celebrations in his honor, and this is a good one.²⁴ Members of the High Council of the Indies come to his residence and escort him, parade-style, through the streets to the great square in front of Batavia Castle and then across the drawbridge and into the castle gate. Soldiers march before him in the plaza, drummers and pipers playing, ensigns carrying white flags of state.

The governor general and other members of the High Council escort him into the grand meeting room, with its chandelier and oil

paintings and grand chairs, where they present his ambassador's credentials, his official instructions, and two versions of the official letter to the emperor, one in Dutch and one in Chinese.²⁵ They drink to his health and wish him a safe and successful journey. Then they accompany him to the water-gate, where Titsingh boards a stately launch.

It's pleasant to see the ships firing salutes as he is rowed past, and to witness flags and pennants being raised up the mainmast as he boards his flagship. There are more speeches and farewells on deck, and more cannonades: Eighteen shots fired, seventeen shots fired in answer, seventeen more, and more, and more. As he writes to his brother, "there is no more glorious way to leave Batavia and return to the Netherlands."²⁶

It's a good start, and he's relieved to leave Batavia behind him.²⁷ Little does he know that within months, he'll be slogging through freezing mountains, hungry and sleep-deprived, wishing he'd never agreed to become ambassador.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Delta

A TRAVELER MUST BE PATIENT, especially in the age of sail. Just fifteen miles north of Batavia, the fleet stops and sits for two days in the oppressive heat, waiting for supplies. There's more waiting a bit farther north, off the coast of Sumatra, because they need to repair a mast. After that, they make reasonable progress, reaching the Chinese coast just two weeks later, but then they sit becalmed for two days among the Wanshan Islands, just south of the Portuguese settlement of Macau. By the time they anchor in front of Macau itself, many crewmembers are getting sick, and Titsingh badly wants to go ashore: Macau's governor has promised a celebration equal to the one given to Lord Macartney the previous year. But Titsingh is advised to stay aboard and resume his journey, because the weather is ominous, and it's typhoon season.

He's particularly unhappy because his son is going ashore. The three-year-old is to be taken to a sumptuous house in Macau, to be cared for by Mrs. Dozy, wife of one of the top officials in the company's China office, but William doesn't know Mrs. Dozy and doesn't want to leave his father, complaining that he's already been abandoned by his mother. "Tears sprang to my eyes," Titsingh writes, "and I was on the point of keeping him with me, but, considering that he could not fall into better hands, I remained firm, promising to be with him again soon."¹ He puts his boy on a launch, promising that he'll come see him in Macau before going to Beijing. He won't be able to keep this promise. William won't see his father for nearly a year.

And then nothing. Having said goodbye to his son and turned down an invitation to Macau, he finds himself just sitting in front of Macau, because Qing officials have refused to issue credentials for the trip to Canton, saying that there are undocumented Chinese passengers aboard. It's true that Titsingh's fleet carries scores of Chinese subjects, but most Dutch ships do. Chinese passengers pay good money for passage from Batavia.² Usually there's not much trouble at the border, but lately, Chinese pirates have been ravaging the coasts, and officials are worried that the immigrants will join them.

The wind begins to howl, and the skies erupt with lightning. Titsingh feels that his flagship is "the clumsiest and most unwieldy ship in the company's service," and by the middle of the night, it's being thrown up and down by the waves.³ The master anchor cable snaps. The ship lurches into the darkness. This is a place filled with reefs and islands infested by pirates. It's a terrifying night.⁴ Fortunately, the storm dies down around dawn.

Officials quickly give permission for the ship to depart, knowing that if anything happens to the ambassador, they'll be held responsible.⁵ And so, guided by Chinese pilots, Titsingh sails northward.

The next destination is the Tiger's Mouth (虎門), gateway to Canton. A pair of fortresses rise above a tangled mass of foliage. By the time Titsingh anchors, it's after dark, too late to get permission to proceed.

Thankfully, there's no thunderstorm tonight, but the quiet of morning is shaken by the *Siam's* guns, which are welcoming a boat. It's Everardus van Braam Houckgeest, and as he steps on deck, it's clear he's upset.⁶ He says he's not angry that Titsingh was named ambassador. He's mad that Titsingh has been given full command over the China Office. He explains that the leadership in Batavia has been misled by his enemies, a three-person cabal in Canton that slanders and undermines him. He says they have no proof of any wrongdoing, and in any case, he has journals in his secret drawer that contain full details about their lies.⁷ He promises to reveal everything, declaring that the evidence will clear up all suspicions.⁸

Titsingh is in a difficult spot. On the one hand, he knows he needs Van Braam's support, not just in Canton but on the long journey to Beijing. On the other, his superiors have ordered him to investigate Van Braam's leadership.⁹ Why are prices for tea and silk and rhubarb so much higher under Van Braam than in the past? Why is so much money being spent on imported port and madeira wine and on porcelain for the company's lodge? Why have travel costs risen so

high? Why did Van Braam decide to make separate deals with individual Chinese merchants instead of dealing with them as a group, as before? Why has Van Braam abandoned the usual record-keeping requirements, so that some members of the Canton Commercial Council haven't signed the minutes and resolution documents properly? Company leaders are distrustful and frustrated, and Titsingh's instructions call for him to investigate. They also leave no doubt that he must take over Van Braam's role: "Upon your arrival in Canton, Your Excellency must remove from the current Chief Van Braam Houckgeest all the authority and operation of the company's affairs, and you must remain in charge of the administration during your stay there."¹⁰

But Van Braam is charismatic. Even Van Braam's own brother is wary of his "self-assurance and eloquence, which he uses to bind to him less-thoughtful people."¹¹ Maybe Titsingh doesn't know about Van Braam's past business dealings and the trail of trouble he's left behind. Or maybe Titsingh is greedy. Whatever the case, Titsingh tells Van Braam that he's brought a large sum of money with him, which he hopes to invest in China.¹²

Van Braam says he'd be delighted to help invest it in the most advantageous and secure manner possible. As Titsingh will later write, Van Braam's "manner and appearance, and his natural affability, led me to trust him completely."¹³ The two make a deal. Van Braam will take charge of Titsingh's capital, promising to lend it to Chinese merchants at the high rate of twenty percent.¹⁴

Van Braam warns Titsingh not to tell anyone about their arrangement, saying it's for Titsingh's own good: The Chinese look down on merchants, and if it were to be revealed that the ambassador was engaging in trade, it would cause him to lose authority and jeopardize the mission.¹⁵ "A Mandarin," Van Braam explains, "must not lower himself to the carrying out of commerce."¹⁶ Titsingh says he understands. It's similar in Japan.

Well, Van Braam says, in that case, Titsingh must also understand that it wouldn't do to take over Van Braam's role as director of the China office. Doing so would cause Titsingh "to lose esteem in the eyes of the viceroy and all the Chinese mandarins, sinking to my far inferior rank."¹⁷ Titsingh assents, promising to arrange things so that Van Braam continues directing commercial affairs just as before.¹⁸

Van Braam is in a much better mood when he says goodbye. He says he'll go ahead to Canton to prepare a proper reception and arrange everything for Titsingh's comfort and pleasure. He'll even cede to Titsingh his own suite in the crowded lodge.¹⁹

And then the *Siam* glides between the green hills and into the

Pearl River delta. This maze of canals and passages, with its shifting shoals, can be dangerous for deep-keeled ships. Europeans have sometimes tried sounding and charting the area, but Qing officials do their best to prevent this, keeping the foreigners dependent on expensive local pilots.

As they proceed upriver, the waters become crowded with vessels of all kinds: Western ships like Titsingh's, large ocean-junks coming from Vietnam or Thailand, and multitudes of little vessels carrying fishers, crabbers, peddlers, cleaners, prostitutes. Some of these people live on boats, forbidden to stay on land. But the very line between land and water is unclear. Rice paddies seem to start in the river itself, and they're pierced by canals, so that boats appear to float on the fields.

The scenery is striking, with hills and mountains, towers and pagodas. Occasional fortresses appear, and most vessels would have to stop to show their documents, but not Titsingh's. As an official guest, he makes swift progress. Even so, it takes three full days to sail from Tiger's Mouth to the anchorage at Huangpu Island.

Huangpu Island, known by its Cantonese name of Whampoa, is the end of the line for most Europeans, who will have to remain at this "most miserable hole in the whole world," overhauling rigging, pumping bilge water, and replacing rotten masts.²⁰ Only higher-ranked people—clerks, bookkeepers, supercargos, and, of course, ambassadors—get to go on to Canton itself, to take residence in the stately lodges there.

Huangpu doesn't look miserable. A picturesque hilltop tower stares down on a temple nestled in greenery. But as you get closer, you can see the sad huts clustered by the water, the peasants bent over rice paddies, the skinny naked children.

It's stiflingly hot, and the sailors are eager to land. While some will have to stay aboard, swatting away rats and cockroaches, others will sleep on shore in bamboo warehouses called bankshalls. These structures are primarily intended to store supplies—rigging, tackle, pitch, paint, and lumber for masts—but there are hammocks and cots, and, just as important, places to buy alcohol. It's nasty stuff, but if you drink enough, you sleep through the gongs that the watchmen beat through the night. Some people end up sleeping forever in cemeteries on neighboring islands: French Island, if you're an officer or official; Dane's Island, if you're a common soldier or sailor.²¹ Crewmembers of the *Siam* are beginning to die.²²

For all its wretchedness, Huangpu is a busy anchorage.²³ Most imposing are the tall European ships, which must anchor here, because the Chinese government doesn't want crews cavorting in

Canton and because European vessels lie so deep in the water that they have trouble negotiating the increasingly shallow river channels. Weaving between the European ships are scores of smaller craft: official customs vessels patrolling for illicit trade, boats of eel sellers, crab hawkers, fishers, peddlars, and washerwomen, who, for a fee, “dye the begrimmed accumulations of the voyage with a deeper hue by soaking them in the river.”²⁴ Sometimes one sees a duck boat, whose master lets his fowl loose to forage during the day and calls them back at night with a whistle.²⁵ Most unpleasant are the dungboats, which transport human excrement to the fields, where it’s mixed with water, stirred, and used for manure. Some vessels belong to compradores, people who provide provisions to the Europeans. Be careful to inspect your supplies, though, or you’ll be given rotten fruit or spoiled meat. If you do end up with a decaying pig, weigh it down before tossing it overboard, because the carcass is liable to be fished out and eaten. These waters teem with desperate people.

Imperial officials do their best to keep a lid on the chaos. Each time a European ship arrives, two customs vessels row out and chain themselves on either side to ensure that no cargo is unloaded before inspection. The largest ships are boarded by the Superintendent of Maritime Customs himself, a man appointed directly by the imperial court, usually thanks to connections with the emperor. He measures the ships’ length and breadth to determine the toll it must pay. This official levy is only one of the many fees, bribes, and exactions collected here. For instance, if he sees anything he likes on board—clocks or watches or jewels—he may make clear his interest, and the Hang merchant who accompanies him is obliged to purchase it and sell it to him well below cost. In recent years, these sorts of bribes have become increasingly expensive, which is one reason so many Hang merchants are going bankrupt. Europeans complain about these fees and extortions but know they must placate the superintendent, so whenever he sails out for an inspection, they send boats to greet him and escort him on board, offering fruit and sweets and wine.²⁶

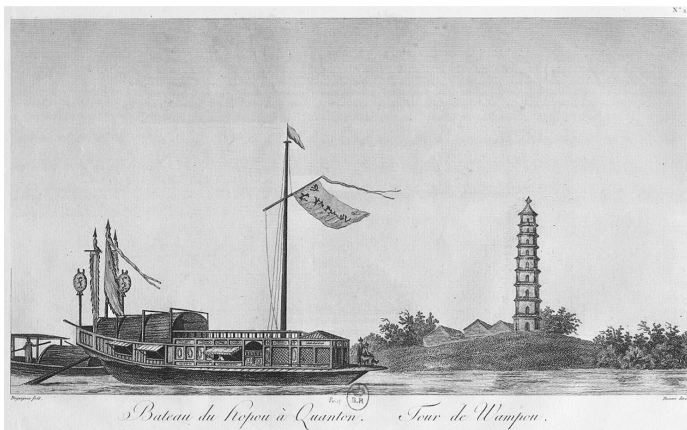


FIGURE 1. The superintendent's boat by Whampoa Island. "Bateau du Hopou à Quantou." This image shows the boat of the superintendent of Maritime Customs, who is responsible for collecting tolls from European ships.

Source: Chrétien-Louis-Joseph de Guignes, *Voyage à Péking, Manille et l'Île de France: faits dans l'intervalle des années 1784 à 1801*, Vol. 4 (Atlas) (Paris: Treuttel & Würtz, 1808), plate 24. Public domain.

Typically, the superintendent waits for six or seven ships to arrive before making a trip to anchorage, but Titsingh will receive a special visit. Van Braam comes on board beforehand, to help Titsingh prepare for the meeting, along with some Hang merchants. They place a tall chair in front of the mirror in Titsingh's stateroom and drape over it a red satin cloth embroidered with a golden dragon. This, they say, is where the emperor's letter will be displayed, and everyone will be expected to kowtow before it, including Titsingh and Van Braam. The merchants demonstrate, kneeling and touching their heads to the floor three times.²⁷

They want to make sure that Titsingh and Van Braam will comply. Every time his Lordship George Macartney was asked to kowtow, he refused. For a while, officials kept the emperor insulated from this rudeness, but as Macartney approached Beijing, news of his obstinacy spread, and the emperor became irritated. Fortunately, the emperor is a gracious man, used to many different cultures and ways. He allowed the official protocols to be relaxed, so Macartney was able to kneel on one knee, as he would do before his own monarch. Yet the emperor didn't forget his lack of courtesy.

Titsingh and Van Braam have made a study of the Macartney mission and its mistakes, informing themselves through many sources, all of which agree that Macartney's refusal to kowtow was a cause for his embassy's failure. One Chinese merchant told Van

Braam that when the emperor saw Macartney refuse to carry out the kowtow he turned to his chief minister and said, “What are these foreigners coming to do here if they cannot adapt themselves to the usages of the country? I did not invite them, and I have no need of their gifts.”²⁸ Similar stories come from other Chinese merchants, Chinese translators, the British themselves, and, most importantly, from European missionaries in Beijing.

Perhaps the most influential missionary is Jean-Baptiste-Joseph de Grammont, who has lived in China for thirty-five years and whose assessments of Macartney’s failure have been read attentively by many, including Van Braam and Titsingh.²⁹ “Never,” Grammont wrote, “was an embassy deserving of better success.... And yet, strange to tell, never was there an embassy that succeeded so ill.”³⁰ Grammont believed that Macartney’s refusal to kowtow was an important reason why:

Because ambassador [Macartney] didn’t want to perform the courtesies according to the custom of the Chinese, the emperor became irritated to such an extent that he issued a decree by which he ordered that [the ambassador] return with all the presents he had brought. Ultimately, the emperor [thought better of this and] decided to allow a courtesy that was neither Chinese nor European when he received [the ambassador].³¹

But the damage was done. The emperor summarily refused all of Macartney’s requests, because “he had bad faith in the ambassador for refusing to carry out Chinese courtesies.”³² The emperor even canceled the usual goodbye audience, sending Macartney away peremptorily.

In fact, these issues of ceremony were not the main reason for Macartney’s precipitous dismissal.³³ Qing officials were more troubled by Macartney’s “absurd and importunate demands,” which included the right to build trading stations on the Chinese coast.³⁴ The emperor naturally couldn’t grant these requests and worried that the British wouldn’t take the refusal gracefully. “The British,” he wrote in an edict, “are the fiercest and boldest [較為強悍] of the people from the Western Ocean kingdoms, and since their wishes haven’t been granted, it’s possible that they might foment trouble among the other Western trading nations.”³⁵ He was also worried that they would make secret connections with local Chinese subjects. So he ordered his officials to get Macartney out of China as soon as possible. Macartney was rushed from Beijing to Guangdong, and to “hasten the forced march of the ambassador,” Macartney was forbidden to go ashore to trade or talk or see the sights.³⁶ The

emperor did ask his officials to be graceful toward the British and even sent special presents, saying he felt bad that the envoy should have to travel during the New Year season.³⁷ But Macartney, it became clear, was traveling less as an honored guest than as a possible enemy.

Titsingh and Van Braam relished reports of Macartney's ill treatment on his voyage back to Canton, such as a supposed lack of provisions and the refusal of feasts and celebrations. When Macartney returned to Canton, he was thin and gaunt, as though he'd aged ten years during his trip.³⁸ As Van Braam wrote in his official diary, "his lordship, after being forced to leave Beijing so precipitously, was accompanied by an honor guard, but this was actually less to show him honor than to keep an eye on him, and he was given no rest until such time that his escort had brought him to his ship and seen him sail out of the Tiger's Mouth."³⁹

All of this, Van Braam has concluded, happened not just because the British refused to kowtow but also because they asked for too much:

The Emperor was certainly all too well informed about what dangerous and invasive neighbors [China] would gain if he were to accede to this request [for British outposts in China]. The usurpation of the English in Bengal and in India, and the fall of those previously powerful sovereigns, are as well known in the Chinese capital as they are to us Europeans, so it is no wonder that [the British] Embassy reached such a sudden, disgraceful, and humiliating end after the first evidence of British national arrogance.⁴⁰

With more modest aims, and, perhaps most importantly, a willingness to perform the kowtow, they might have achieved more:

The old emperor was so enthusiastic about the coming of the British embassy that he made all kinds of extra expensive preparations to receive it, but the refusal to carry out the normal gesture of honor [*eerbewijs*] changed the situation in every way, inciting the sensitivity of the sovereign, which is what caused all the troubles. Anyone who knows China even a little bit must be convinced that this was the principal reason for the total failure of this glorious embassy.⁴¹

Van Braam immediately grasped that British failure opened up an opportunity for the Dutch, and shortly before Macartney left Canton, Van Braam wrote a letter to his bosses urging them to send a mission to China (this was before Viceroy Changlin asked him to do so):

A humbler Dutch mission, with less expensive (but, for the Chinese, more useful), presents, would have had all the wished-for success, because our nation has everywhere informed itself about the ways and customs of all the lands and people that we come into contact with, and, just as during previous embassies, we would not have refused to carry out the normal gesture of honor to the emperor.⁴²

Now, thanks to Changlin's request for a sixtieth-year envoy, as well as Van Braam's powers of persuasion and exaggeration, the Dutch have their chance to meet the emperor, and they're determined to succeed where the British failed. They've carefully studied Macartney's mission. Titsingh has even copied out documents from the Macartney mission in his own hand, whereas he would usually give the job to one of his scribes.⁴³ One key lesson is not to raise a fuss about Chinese courtesies. As Titsingh puts it, "Being in a foreign land, I must follow their customs."⁴⁴ His bosses also recognized this, ordering him to "observe the required ceremonies, in keeping with the customs of the country."⁴⁵

So today, when the Hang merchants ask whether Titsingh would like to learn the proper method for performing the kowtow so that he can perform it in front of the emperor's letter, he says yes and watches carefully as they demonstrate.⁴⁶ First, kneel on the floor. Then touch your head to the floor three times. Then stand up. Repeat the sequence three times. He and Van Braam practice. The merchants express their satisfaction and rush away to meet the superintendent. Titsingh keeps practicing after they leave.⁴⁷

It's ten o'clock and getting hot when the superintendent's vessel finally arrives, flying a golden imperial flag. There's a great to-do as he boards the *Siam* with his many attendants. Van Braam escorts him to Titsingh's cabin, and Titsingh greets him at the door. Suleng'e (蘇楞額) is a Manchu, like the emperor himself, and his position here is of direct interest to the emperor, because the revenues he raises as superintendent are a significant source of the imperial household's income. Titsingh offers him the golden chair, and seats are found for his suite of officials.

Suleng'e says he's delighted that Titsingh has come, but Titsingh thinks he looks nervous. Suleng'e begins asking pointed questions. What is the motive for this embassy? Is its intention really just to congratulate the emperor? Or does the ambassador intend to raise complaints or make requests?

It's possible that he's anxious to save his emperor the sort of unpleasantness that attended Lord Macartney's embassy last year, but Titsingh suspects that Suleng'e is more concerned about his own

interests. Just a few days ago, news arrived in Canton that Suleng'e would be recalled to Beijing, and he may fear complaints about his conduct.⁴⁸ Superintendants are notorious for bribes and exactions, and Westerners have had disagreements with them. Van Braam had a disagreement with Suleng'e's predecessor, which got ugly, and Suleng'e is not considered much of an improvement.⁴⁹

But Titsingh knows he must speak carefully, because the Superintendent of Maritime Customs has direct access to the imperial court, so he tells Suleng'e that he has no intention of making requests or complaints in court. He's been sent here for one purpose: to congratulate the emperor on his sixtieth year on the throne.⁵⁰

The superintendent still looks wary and warns Titsingh that now is the time to reveal anything he plans to discuss in court. Titsingh says he has nothing to discuss: "Ever since the Dutch have traded here, our nation has always, in all her transactions, behaved honestly and honorably. If, after making such a clear statement saying that I will make no requests or complaints to the court, and I later do precisely that, I would bring to my nation justifiable scorn, as well as all the consequences that that scorn would bring about."⁵¹ Suleng'e asks Titsingh and Van Braam to swear that the only goal they have is to congratulate the emperor. They do so. The superintendent smiles. The other officials also seem relieved.

Scholars will later blame Titsingh for this promise, saying that it was a "rash" mistake and that the mission failed here.⁵² They will even say that he was an unwitting "victim," caught up in a Chinese tribute charade and unaware of the "true character" of the embassy.⁵³ But this isn't fair.

Titsingh knows what he's doing. He understands that diplomacy here is conducted according to different ideals, focused more on maintaining relations than on discussing business. He has led missions to the shogun's court in Japan, where his primary duty was to kowtow to the sovereign, with no expectations of negotiations. Titsingh's bosses also understand East Asian diplomacy, and they've made clear that his goal in China is to perform a "ceremonial embassy," whose main purpose is to congratulate the emperor.⁵⁴ Such a goal might seem at odds with a modern narrative of Sino-Western culture clash, but to Titsingh and most other employees of the Dutch East India Company, it doesn't seem strange.⁵⁵ To be sure, his bosses have said he should go ahead and talk about conditions in Canton if he gets a good opportunity. But their instructions are explicit: Do so only if it won't jeopardize the main goal of the mission—to congratulate the emperor.⁵⁶ Titsingh isn't making a rash mistake. He's proceeding wisely and following orders.

His tact works. The superintendant is happy and moves to the next item of business: the letter that Titsingh has brought for the emperor. As the superintendant reads, however, he shakes his head, perturbed. The style is poor, and there are strange expressions.⁵⁷ It's also just a quarter of the length of the Dutch version.

Titsingh apologizes, explaining that he and his countrymen were unaware of the proper format for a letter to the emperor and that the Chinese of Batavia are too uncultured to properly render courtly Chinese. The main translator was a man who originally hailed from the Southern port of Quanzhou and has little education.

No matter, the superintendant says: The letter will just have to be rewritten in proper Chinese.

Suleng'e turns to the next topic: the presents for the emperor. He asks for the list. Here, once again, Titsingh must offer his apologies. The French have been attacking Dutch shipping, and the ships from Holland got stuck at the Cape of Good Hope, so Batavia has received nothing that might serve as gifts for the emperor aside from a few precious textiles. And so, Titsingh says, we hope you and the viceroy will help us gather here in Canton gifts suitable for the emperor. It seems that this is a good response. Suleng'e says he'll be delighted to help. After they enjoy some sweet wine together, he rises to depart.

Surprisingly, Titsingh hasn't been asked to kowtow. Why? "It occurred to me that their request was made only to find out if I would make the same kind of trouble that the Lord Macartney had made, in which case the embassy would presumably not have been accepted."⁵⁸

Anyway, the superintendant seems to be in a good mood. He even offers to send an official boat to take Titsingh to Canton in style, an offer Titsingh declines, because he doesn't want to wait—the heat is already unbearable. The two men part, the superintendant taking the letter for the emperor, which he promises to help improve.

Titsingh boards his own ship's launch and heads toward the great city of Canton.

CHAPTER FIVE

Canton

CANTON STRETCHES FOR MILES along the Pearl River and into the water itself, where thousands of houseboats form suburbs whose liquid lanes are barely wide enough for small boats to squeeze through.¹ Titsingh's launch steers toward the Western trade quarter, where the foreigners' lodges stand back from a spacious riverfront fronted by a fine stone quay. The Dutch building, with its European-style pillars and sliding glass windows, seems especially grand, as is only fitting, considering the Hollanders' long connection to China.²

Van Braam is waiting at the stairs that run down to the river, accompanied by a greeting party, which welcomes Titsingh ashore and escorts him through the garden to the lodge. Inside, it's surprisingly large, extending back more than 150 yards, from the dining room with its wide veranda that overlooks the garden to Thirteen-Lodge Street. There are meeting rooms, bedrooms, kitchens, warehouses, even a winter room with two English-style fireplaces for when it gets cold. Van Braam himself helped redesign and renovate it, at a cost that worried his bosses.³

Now he escorts Titsingh to the Council Room and seats him in the president's chair, which Van Braam used to occupy. The other gentlemen take seats according to their ranks, but Titsingh is too tired to conduct any business now. There will be time later for the first formal meeting, when he'll hand authority for trading operations back to Van Braam. He asks Van Braam to show him to his quarters.

Van Braam has a taste for the finer things, and this is the best

suite in the lodge, but Titsingh is disappointed. He's used to palatial living and had hoped he'd be invited to reside in the house that he's heard Lord Macartney briefly occupied after returning from Beijing: large and well appointed, with a lovely Chinese garden. He finds the suite cramped, albeit "charmingly furnished."⁴ Others have less. Van Braam has to move into the rooms of Mr. Dozy, the next-in-line, and Mr. Dozy has displaced the next ranking gentleman, and so on. The best rooms are on the ground floor. Soldiers and their commanders sleep in rooms upstairs, and servants and valets live under sloping attic roofs.

Titsingh begins arranging things to his liking, unpacking his books and papers, setting up his bed, firing his lazy steward. He tries to hire a wing in the next lodge over, hoping to make more space by tearing down the wall, but, he writes, "because of the many ships expected this year, there wasn't a single room in any of the lodges that wasn't already spoken for, so I had to make do as well as I could."⁵ He holds meetings, studies the Canton office's records, opens communication with officials and Chinese merchants, and tries to meet the other foreigners.

He's particularly keen to meet the British. When he lived in Bengal, he formed enduring friendships with erudite Englishmen and Scots, whom he entertained at his huge house, pouring Dutch gin generously. The British appreciated his hospitality and capacity to hold liquor. "This is not'ing," he once said in his Dutch accent to an astonished British drinking companion, "it is waters to me. Come Colo-nel, anoder."⁶ He and his British friends rode elephants, went tiger hunting, shot wild buffalo, and speared boars and antelope from horseback.⁷

But even though the Europeans here generally keep up a lively calendar, with dinners and social calls, the British issue no invitation to Titsingh. It seems to be an intentional slight.⁸ Even worse, they seem to be spreading rumors that Titsingh isn't a legitimate ambassador because he wasn't appointed by his sovereign, whereas Lord Macartney was named ambassador by the British King George III. They're saying Titsingh won't be allowed to go to Beijing.⁹

Titsingh worries that the British are even interfering with his progress. He's been waiting too long for a formal meeting with the viceroy and other top officials. These officials have made excuses, saying that the provincial governor (撫院) has had to go deal with flooding in nearby counties,¹⁰ and that the viceroy has had to go administer the provincial examinations.¹¹ He suspects that these are empty excuses, and everyone is noticing the delays.¹² Are the British succeeding in turning Qing officials against him?

Titsingh becomes more suspicious when he receives a visit from four officials sent by Viceroy Changlin, who ask pointed questions about the diplomatic documents. Why is the Chinese translation so short? Why does it even exist in the first place?¹³ Titsingh repeats what he said to Suleng'e: the Chinese translation was prepared merely to provide an overview of the Dutch text, and the translator was a common man from Quanzhou City who lived in Batavia, where it's difficult to find proper scholars. That's why the language is poor, with odd expressions from the Quanzhou dialect. He apologizes and asks for help preparing a better translation. The officials ask why the Dutch version of the letter isn't signed by the Dutch sovereign but only by four rulers in Batavia. Titsingh explains that there wasn't time for a proper document from far-away Holland, because news of the emperor's sixtieth anniversary celebrations only reached Batavia recently. The rulers in Batavia are authorized to issue diplomatic credentials in such cases.

Then why, the officials ask, does the letter only have one seal—that of the Dutch East India Company? Why haven't the four gentlemen leaders in Batavia placed their own seals on it? Titsingh explains Dutch epistolary practices and patiently answers the many other questions they ask.

It's tempting to become indignant, but he understands why the officials are worried. False ambassadors have been sent in the past. The viceroy, he notes, "wants to be fully covered so that he is not exposed to any unpleasantness in the court, where people might also try to spread their poison."¹⁴ Titsingh's measured tone works. After more tea and wine, the officials depart, satisfied.

It seems that the men's report to the viceroy is well received, because Changlin begins to help actively. For one thing, he helps prepare a good translation of the letter. Translating documents into official Chinese isn't easy, and this one will be seen by the emperor himself, a man known for discerning tastes. Moreover, the content of the Dutch letter raises challenges. The British are right that Titsingh wasn't sent by a king but rather by commissioners-general. How does one finesse this fact? How does one even translate the term "commissioners-general"? How does one deal with the fact that the commissioners themselves represent not a king but a princely regent, William of Orange?

The translation goes through many iterations. One early draft is translated the usual way, by the committee method. Van Braam sits down in his apartment with a group of educated Chinese merchants and orally translates the original Dutch into Portuguese and English, which the merchants then try to render in Chinese. They work

sentence by sentence, hour by hour by hour.¹⁵ This version raises as many questions as it resolves, so they try a different tack. Van Braam translates the Dutch letter into French, doing his best to capture the formal and elevated style. This is then sent to a member of the viceroy's staff, a Chinese man named Carlos, who studied for twenty years in Rome and Paris. Carlos prepares a translation and passes it to the viceroy.

The viceroy, Changlin, is a supremely educated man, with a large staff of literati, but even he submits his letter for critique to other scholars, who meet with Carlos to find ever more effective phrasings. Among these scholars are top officials in the Canton region.¹⁶

Titsingh is intrigued by this whole process, which demonstrates to him how hard Chinese is. He advises his bosses to be more careful in the future: "One can see from all this how difficult it is to fully understand the courtly language and to be able to acquit oneself properly in this writing style with taste. If ever there's another opportunity like this in the future, it is vital to be extremely careful with the sending of Chinese translations from Batavia."¹⁷

In the meantime, Van Braam takes charge of beautifying the Dutch letter. Since Macartney's royal letter was written on parchment and the Dutch letter is on paper, Van Braam purchases a large piece of parchment and commissions artists to paint a border of flowers and lions. The original Dutch letter is then carefully pasted on.¹⁸ The Dutch letter was originally enveloped in yellow satin, which Van Braam finds too plain. He prepares a white satin cover with gold dragons, finely embroidered in the Chinese style. This is placed in a silver-plated wooden box with golden embossing.¹⁹

While all this translating and beautifying is going on, Titsingh and Van Braam go shopping for gifts for the emperor. The viceroy and the superintendant of maritime trade help them draw up a shopping list, and the superintendant himself comes with them to visit the shop of Scotsman Daniel Beale, a specialist in fine clockwork.²⁰ His inventory contains marvelous mechanisms of gold and silver that play music and perform scenes: fishermen casting rods, couples dancing, birds singing, scribes writing. They're highly popular among the upper classes of China and command extraordinary prices. A former superintendant once demanded as a bribe a clockwork device worth 70,000 taels, which is enough to buy a fine country estate.²¹ Even watches can command tens of thousands of taels, and the custom is to acquire them in pairs. The superintendant and a group of other officials help select two of the most intricate large clocks. This is the main present, but Titsingh and Van Braam also buy other items—two huge mirrors, fine guns, telescopes, watches, and so forth—trying to

stay within the budget allotted by Batavia.

Titsingh is pleased with the results, especially the clocks. “Never before,” he wrote, “have I seen anything like them. I couldn’t get enough of the beauty of the pieces and the artfulness of the works.”²²

Yet, truth be told, the gifts are less impressive than those that had been brought by the British, who had expended enormous effort and money on a set of presents that they intended to serve as advertisements for British industry (although, according to the grumblings of Dutch observers, the planetarium they claimed to have made in England was actually of German manufacture).²³

Now that the gifts have been purchased and the letter prepared, the viceroy feels it’s time to hold the welcome ceremony. A Chinese scholar writes, in a poem commemorating the event,

The Dutch present ships have arrived at the Tiger’s Mouth,
like tall inns on the oyster-shell mirror of the water, a joyful noise ringing
out.
They’re filled with precious offerings, but first they must transmit
their official document, wrapped in gold.²⁴

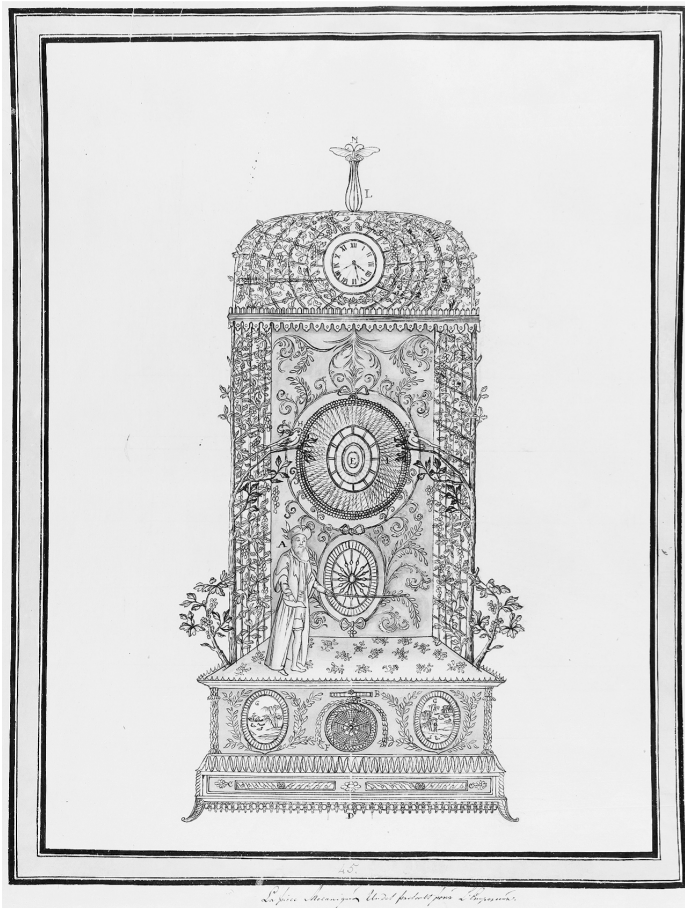


FIGURE 2. A clock for the emperor. “La pièce mécanique, un des presents pour l'empereur.”

This drawing, probably made by a Chinese artist in Canton, depicts one of the two clocks Titsingh and Van Braam purchased as gifts for the emperor. “Never before,” Titsingh wrote, “had I seen anything like them. I couldn’t get enough of the beauty of the pieces and the artfulness of the works.”

Source: Album of Chinese drawings and documents, BR 350, No. 45, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Florence, Italy. Reproduced by permission of the Ministero per i beni e le attività culturali e per il turismo / Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Firenze. Reproduction prohibited.

The purpose of the ceremony is to formally receive the Dutch documents into the imperial system, to be transmitted to Beijing, and the venue should be solemn and sacred, so the viceroy has chosen the nearby Haizhuang Temple (海幢寺), a beautiful building set among gardens, which has been decorated to express the emperor’s warm welcome to these men from afar. As the poet puts it:

Figures of dragons, a palace of flowers, the Haizhuang Temple's
Buddhist ferns and palm trees shade the clear river.
Merciful Bodhisattvas gaze over mighty heaven
Today's glory is to be shared by all countries.
Ten thousand bushels of lustrous glass beads hang at the colorful gate,
and a soft carpet has been spread on the ground,
[its color] mirroring the crimson flags.²⁵

The boat they send to pick Titsingh up is also suitably grand, painted red, with carved dragons and imperial pennants.²⁶ When it moors in front of the lodge early in the morning, Titsingh is impressed, but his mood changes when he finds that the viceroy hasn't sent any high officials to escort him, just the Hang merchant Pan Youdu (潘有度).²⁷ "I might reasonably have expected to wait for the escort of some mandarins, but experience had already persuaded me of the false ideas people have formed in Europe about the civility and courtesy of the Chinese."²⁸

Yet he boards, along with Van Braam and an honor guard of German soldiers, and the boat sets off across the busy river, flying its imperial banner. The temple's huge entrance gate stands under the tall shade trees, flanked on either side by galleries where you can buy tea and snacks. A tree grows right through the roof of the gallery on the right.²⁹

The dock has been laid out with red carpet, and robed officials welcome them ashore and accompany them through the gate, leading them through a long courtyard between two rows of brightly clad soldiers at arms. There are two more gates before one gets to the main temples, with their green-tiled roofs decorated with dragons. A huge tent has been set up to shade nine chairs arranged in a half circle on a carpet. The viceroy and six high officials are waiting here to greet them.

The party's attention is drawn to a table at the rear, draped in imperial yellow. The emperor's tablet stands on it, a wooden panel carved with gold letters. A vase burns incense in front, as though it's a shrine.

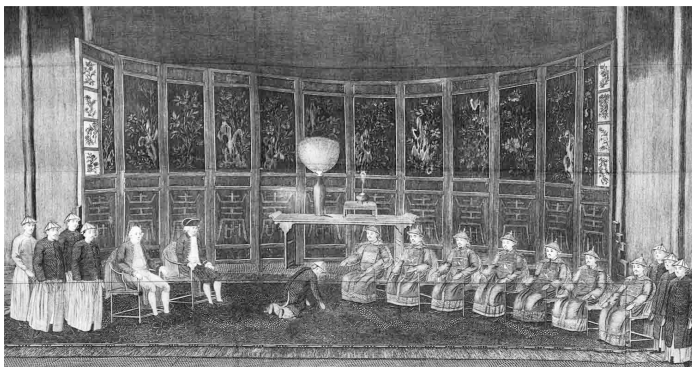


FIGURE 3. Haizhuang Temple ceremony, 1794. Detail from a depiction of the Haizhuang Temple ceremony, with Titsingh and Van Braam sitting on the left and a row of Qing officials sitting on the right, first Changlin and then the others, in descending rank. The kneeling figure is likely a translator.

Source: Engraving from André Everard van Braam Houckgeest, *Voyage de l'ambassade de la Compagnie des Indes Orientales Hollandaises, vers l'empereur de la Chine, dans les années 1794 & 1795*, Vol. 1 (Philadelphia: M.L.E. Moreau de Saint-Méry, 1797), p. 16. Public domain.

That's because it is a sort of shrine, a manifestation of the imperial presence. The emperor has never visited this province, 1,500 miles from Beijing, but officials and ambassadors are meant to bow as though he's here. This ritual is part of the vast system of ceremony that upholds the Qing political system.³⁰

Attendants place two red cushions on the carpet in front of the shrine, and everyone watches the Dutchmen closely. Last year, Macartney refused to kowtow in this very temple in front of many of these same people, merely bending one knee in the direction of the emperor's tablet.³¹

Titsingh is determined to do the kowtow and do it right. While an official keeps tempo, like "an officer exercising troops," he and Van Braam kneel and bow their heads to the ground three times and repeat the salute twice.³² Titsingh is happy with the results: "Having watched the Chinese in Batavia perform this compliment many times in their temples, I had no trouble performing it precisely the same way."³³

The officials are also pleased and lead them to their chairs. The viceroy, Changlin, sits nearest to them. He's an imposing and charismatic man, with a trim beard and a way with words, and Titsingh likes him at once.³⁴ All the officials are wearing hats, so Titsingh puts his back on. Long ago, Manchus used to remove hats when performing rituals like this, but now they leave them on in the Chinese manner.³⁵

After some conversation, Titsingh gets up and presents the official letter to Changlin, who stands to receive it. He reads the Chinese translation, which he of course knows well, since he helped write it. Then he asks whether Titsingh might be able to set out for Beijing soon, just in case the emperor might want to see him in Beijing before the New Year.

Titsingh doesn't like this idea. He expected he'd set out for Beijing in March, once the weather gets better and he's had time to get ready. But he thinks there's little chance that the emperor will actually expect him in Beijing by New Year's Day. It's already October 13, and this year Chinese New Year will fall on January 21. Just consider how much time his letter will take to get there! And then it will have to be read and acted on, and then you have to add up the time it will take for the emperor's reply to return to Canton. Titsingh can't imagine all this could be settled in time, so he says yes, he's ready to go on the emperor's orders. As the translator conveys Titsingh's words on bended knee, the viceroy seems very pleased.

Tea is served, and small bowls of bird's nest soup. While everyone sips, attendants are placing more cushions in front of the emperor's altar, in concentric half-circles. Soon, the group rises to perform the kowtow again, the viceroy and top officials in front, the Dutch in back. Titsingh watches carefully and emulates the viceroy's precise manner.

Then it's time for a party in the gardens. A crowd of people is waiting for them—Dutch and Chinese and Manchus—and Van Braam's and Titsingh's cooks have helped prepare a "proper" European-style meal. After dinner, they explore the gardens, which were owned by a Hang Merchant named Locqua until he went bankrupt and they were confiscated.³⁶ They're overgrown, but Titsingh finds them "romantic" and hopes he'll be able to stay here after coming back from Beijing.

There are plays and feasts and performances, with young acrobats whose feats amaze Titsingh: "Nothing like it will ever be seen in Europe." The party lasts into the evening, and Titsingh and Van Braam don't get back to the lodge until eleven o'clock at night, tired but "utterly satisfied to have spent such a pleasureable day after such long confinement."³⁷

The next day, the British finally visit the Dutch lodge. "It seems," Titsingh writes, "that they had counted on not seeing me recognized as ambassador, but now that this was definitively decided, they came 'late to the party.' I nonetheless accepted their gesture as good coin, attributing it more to national competition than to personal prejudice."³⁸ He's especially gracious to the British supervisor, Mr.

Browne, hoping to restore relations between the British and Dutch lodges, which have suffered under Van Braam. Titsingh finds that he likes Mr. Browne.

In the meantime, Changlin writes a report to the emperor. He must be careful, because the British are right: An ambassador should be dispatched by his sovereign. If Changlin sends a false ambassador, the emperor might fire him and seize his family fortune. So Changlin reminds the emperor of the great distances involved and says that since there's no way to communicate quickly between Holland and China, Titsingh's sovereign, Prince William of Nassau, has given authority to Batavia to dispatch ambassadors on his behalf. "This year," Changlin writes,

Nederburgh and the other officials in Batavia heard that a universal great celebration will take place next year in honor of the great emperor's sixtieth year on the throne. If they had waited to first return to their country to prepare documents and gifts, however, they would certainly have been late and missed the celebration, ... so they chose to inform their king while, at the same time, obeying their monarch's orders to act on his behalf, copying out credential documents and respectfully preparing tribute items. Then they immediately dispatched the great director Titsingh as tribute ambassador from Batavia to Guangdong Province, requesting that I and my fellow officials help them compose a memorial, begging your majesty for the favor of allowing them to go to the capital to kowtow and offer congratulations.³⁹

It's a clever bit of reasoning, careful not to impugn Prince William's authority while making clear that the prince's representatives are legitimate. It also flatters the emperor. Perhaps there are no longer plans for a grand sixtieth anniversary ceremony, but the foreigners didn't know that. The anniversary is so significant that it has attracted attention far away in the Western Oceans.

Changlin must also reassure the emperor that there won't be any unpleasantness around the kowtow, so he vouches for the Dutch: "We immediately met with the ambassadors, and they gazed northward toward the imperial palace, carrying out the ceremony of the three kneelings and nine kowtows."⁴⁰ He says he has thoroughly vetted their words and demeanor and found them respectful and cooperative. The contrast with the British is implicit but clear.

Changlin asks for a determination: Is the Dutch embassy in keeping with precedent? Can accommodation be found in Beijing? If so, then should the Dutch be present on New Year's Day? Or would it be better to have the ambassador wait in Canton through the winter and go to Beijing in the summer, to celebrate the emperor's birthday

on the thirteenth day of the eighth lunar month (September 25)? Or perhaps the emperor might not wish to receive the Dutch at all, in which case the documents and presents could be conveyed to the capital by an official?⁴¹ Changlin puts things delicately but leaves no doubt of his strong support for the Dutch embassy.

Titsingh is gratified to learn that Changlin's report is "flattering" to the Dutch and likely "to cause a great sensation in the court."⁴² But he doesn't like hearing that Changlin may actually expect him to be in Beijing in time for Chinese New Year. This news, Titsingh writes, "was very disagreeable to me.... On the day of my reception, I had no expectation that this might happen."⁴³

Titsingh decides he must speed up his work, but there's so much to do. He's been tasked with investigating affairs here at the Dutch lodge, to see whether Van Braam and his colleagues are making money from kickbacks or illicit price differentials. He scrutinizes the books, researches market values, and conducts interviews. He even tries asking the other Europeans about pricing, to set a sort of baseline, but finds that they prefer to keep their negotiations secret.

Van Braam and his colleagues insist they're making their money legitimately, by investing in trading ventures, often with Americans, whose trade is increasing rapidly. They point out that these ventures are lucrative partly because they are so risky. Mr. Dozy says that last year he lost thirty thousand Spanish dollars when the French captured a ship he had invested in. He swears to Titsingh that he's just as poor as he was in 1792, when he arrived in Canton deeply in debt.⁴⁴

Van Braam insists that he has tremendous debts, especially in Europe, but it's clear to everyone that he's made enormous amounts of money here in very little time.⁴⁵ Did he profit by underhanded means? Or by skill and luck? Titsingh can't know for sure, but he does learn that three years ago, Van Braam bought a batch of opium when the market price was low and since then has been selling it during the off seasons, when prices rise. In addition, he's been sole investor in one or two American ships per year.

Titsingh can't help feeling impressed:

The most amazing part of it is how easily he carries out all of this, thanks to his excellent connections with the Chinese merchants. He barely steps out of the lodge, and yet everything happens outside so promptly and regularly that everyone who's unaware of this would believe it was pure fiction.⁴⁶

Perhaps Titsingh himself can benefit from Van Braam's expertise,

which is why he's entrusted him with his capital.

Titsingh also investigates another issue that's troubling him: Why are there no other European ambassadors here? Van Braam told Batavia that the English, Portuguese, and Spanish were planning to send emissaries, and Titsingh was "extremely mortified" when he learned that he's the only one.⁴⁷ He confronts Van Braam, who insists that he only conveyed what the Chinese had told him in April. He'd had to write his letter quickly, and it was only later that he'd had time to follow up with the English, who told him they weren't sending an embassy, and with the Spanish and Portuguese, who said they would first have to confirm with their superiors in Manila and Goa.⁴⁸

This doesn't allay Titsingh's suspicions. He checks with the other foreigners. The Spanish director, Manuel de Agote, at first says only that he's been given no authorization from his superiors to send any embassy. Titsingh follows up with a formal letter, asking whether the viceroy did indeed ask Agote to send an envoy, as Van Braam has claimed. The Spaniard says no, but he does say that back in April, Van Braam himself said he was tasked by the viceroy to ask Agote to send an envoy, and he includes for Titsingh a copy of the letter that Van Braam wrote, in which Van Braam indicated that perhaps Agote himself might serve as the Spanish ambassador.⁴⁹ Privately, Agote notes in his diary that he felt compelled to answer Titsingh in this way "so as not to do injury to a third party."⁵⁰ Perhaps Agote is covering for Van Braam.

When Titsingh asks the British, they do indeed confirm that the viceroy asked them to send an embassy. Director Browne tells Titsingh that the viceroy wanted to follow up on a promise that Macartney had made after returning from Beijing: that Britain would soon send another ambassador. The viceroy had notified the emperor, who seemed pleased. But when no British mission materialized, the viceroy had to find a way to placate the emperor:

The viceroy having perhaps rather too precipitately gone this far, it became an object of some consequence that the Emperor should not be altogether disappointed, & reflecting that from the length of time and distance intervening, such a disappointment might very possibly happen notwithstanding the most favorable intentions of the British Government, he wishes to know whether in that case the English Factory could send up a gentleman who might in some degree supply the deficiency; that such a measure would be sufficient to save his credit with the Emperor and an assurance to that effect from [us] would make his mind easy. I accordingly did not hesitate to say that in the event of such a disappointment there would be no difficulty in complying with the viceroy's wishes.⁵¹

The viceroy, Mr. Browne notes, also hoped to obtain similar commitments from other European nations in Canton, to please the emperor, especially in case a proper British ambassador should not be found. If somehow the extent of the British plans was exaggerated—in fact there were no concrete plans at all—then, Browne writes, that was hardly Van Braam's fault. And, Mr. Browne concludes, with a flourish of flattery, "it must be allowed Mr Van Braam appears to have been activated by a laudable zeal for the honor of his nation in endeavours to procure so respectable a representative as your Excellency."⁵²

This satisfies Titsingh. In a report, he writes that Van Braam was misled by the viceroy, and he urges his bosses not to be too angry about being duped, because his embassy is nonetheless creating goodwill in China.⁵³ The viceroy and other officials in Canton are going out of their way to cast favor and respect upon the Dutch.

There are advantages for Titsingh as well: The other Europeans "are continually showing attentiveness toward me."⁵⁴ Titsingh hosts grand dinners each Thursday for the British and others, just as he used to do in Bengal. He's a bit disappointed by the food, though. He'd heard that Canton is a culinary "Promised Land," but although the meat here is good, the bread is bad, the vegetables are poor, and the fish is mediocre (except for the delicious mandarin-fish).⁵⁵ Food is also expensive, because he has to buy it through the compradors, who raise their prices to pay bribes to officials. "The richer they are," he writes, "the more they are cut down."⁵⁶ Titsingh keeps careful records of his expenditures so he can claim reimbursement later, consoling himself with the expectation that he'll make a tidy sum from the money he entrusted to Van Braam.

Despite the disappointing food, he finds much to enjoy here. The views from the lodge are impressive. "The river," he writes to his brother, "is covered with thousands of vessels, with the stationary ones leaving enough room for the others to pass by, as though forming streets of water. The number of vessels coming and going is endless and unceasing, and the continual swarming and movement is beyond all imagination."⁵⁷

He only wishes he could go partake of other pleasures. "Upriver," he writes, "not far from our lodges, there lie large play-vessels, with girls of pleasure who are schooled—from what I hear—in all the requisite skills. These vessels are arrayed as though in streets upon the water, and most of the Chinese go there in the evening to enjoy themselves, since they are much nicer and larger than their own houses."⁵⁸ But he and the others aren't allowed to go visit them, a disappointing difference from Japan. In Deshima, he could arrange

for a companion easily, and she could stay with him as long as he gave the proper gifts and payments to her and her family.⁵⁹ Here in China, these arrangements aren't allowed, or, rather, one has to be far more circumspect. As he writes to his brother, "Since this is forbidden fruit for us, I can't say anything else about it at present. Everything in its proper time."⁶⁰

In general, all is going well. Canton is pleasant. He stands to make money. And he can't imagine he'll actually have to rush off to Beijing. Bureaucracies are slow, and the distances are vast.

But in this case, the bureaucrats move quickly. The emperor soon receives Changlin's letter and decides he wants to see Titsingh by New Year's Day.

A Dreadful Prospect

MEMOS AND REPORTS FLOW to the emperor constantly, far more than he can possibly read, so most are filtered out by the bureaucracy. But Changlin is a high official, and his dispatch, marked urgent, is read immediately. The emperor annotates it in the imperial red and sends it on to his Grand Council for investigation. Are the foreigners' documents legitimate? Is the strange writing really that of the Holland people? Should the ambassadors be welcomed to court?

The Grand Council is the emperor's executive committee, responsible for reviewing correspondence and helping draft edicts. Its offices stand very close to the imperial residence itself, making it easy for the emperor to meet with the councilors each morning or summon them for "late conversations."¹ The councilors show the Dutch documents to one of the court's foremost experts from the Western Ocean countries, court missionary Joseph-Bernard d'Almeida (索德超), who affirms that they are written in Dutch but regrets that he can't read them.² Other missionaries are called in, one after another, and asked a series of questions. "Where is Holland situated?" "Is it far from France?" "Is it at war?" "How do the Dutch dress?" "What to do they eat?" "Is Holland larger than England?"³

It turns out that none of these missionaries and no one in any of the various bureaus can read the language of Holland, but the councilors feel that this isn't a severe obstacle. If allowed to come to the capital, the ambassadors will be able to communicate by using Latin, the Western Ocean people's "Mandarin language."⁴

The Grand Council canvasses the opinions of various ministers and

princes, and the support is unanimous:

Our emperor's great virtue engenders prosperity and good fortune even in the corners of the seas, awakening to civilization the secluded country of Holland, which lies across more than a hundred thousand li of ocean, so that it has sent special envoys in the hope of bowing down and congratulating the emperor during the national celebrations of his sixtieth year on the throne. Their documents and letters contain words and meanings that are respectful and accommodating, and truly this is an auspicious omen and a good thing. The emperors' courtiers say that the Dutch embassy is just one of many good omens. The rains have been abundant, the people have been preserved from calamity and violence, and the public works have proved solid and enduring: All of these things are the result of the diligence and firmness in action of our Emperor, ..., and thus it is that [the Dutch] have come from so far on such an arduous journey to gather for the banquet. The rivers are clear and the omens are good, such as rarely seen in the annals of history.⁵

This is, of course, pleasant for an old emperor to read, and he instructs the Grand Council to draft an edict inviting the Dutch to the New Year's celebration.⁶

What should they say about the ambassador's legitimacy? Since Titsingh was not in fact directly dispatched by his sovereign, they admit that the Dutch request is not "entirely in accordance with our system." But the edict makes clear that considerable extra investigation was carried out, removing any doubts: "There is no reason to go into any deep discussions about this. Let the ambassadors come to the capital and present themselves, to satisfy their country's sincere feelings of admiration."⁷

The emperor has decided that he wants Titsingh to be present for the New Year celebrations, so the edict makes clear that he must hurry: "They must," the edict reads, "arrive in the capital by the twentieth day of the twelfth month, one or two days before the closing of the seals, so that they can be invited to be feasted in the company of the Mongolian princes and dukes, along with the ambassadors and ministers of all the foreign countries."⁸ To facilitate their quick movement through the empire, the edict commands governors-general, governors, and county magistrates to provide every necessity.

The edict is quickly sealed and promulgated, and a special copy is sent to Canton by the fastest imperial courier service: the "six-hundred-li" post, which is meant to travel 600 li (200 miles) per day. The service doesn't travel quite that fast, but the speed is still impressive: It takes just twelve days for the edict to cover the 1,500

miles to Guangdong, nearly a record.⁹

And this is how, far sooner than Titsingh had hoped, he learns about the emperor's favorable reply. The news, he notes, "brought me into a state of utter turmoil."¹⁰ He writes to his British financial agents, in his imperfect English, "Traveling in such a inclement season gives me a dreadful prospect."¹¹

He's supposed to be ready in less than two weeks. He tells officials he can't possibly do that. But it's an imperial order, and Van Braam entreats him to reconsider, saying that if they don't leave Canton by the determined date—November 22, 1794—there's no way they'll arrive in Beijing before Chinese New Year.¹² The ambassadors would miss the emperor's coronation anniversary. Van Braam says he'll help as much as possible and tells Titsingh he shouldn't be such a perfectionist with his official correspondence, which keeps him up late at night. After all, Van Braam points out, can there be any better excuse for submitting short or incomplete reports?

Titsingh assents, but there are so many things to do that it simply seems impossible. One of the most important tasks is to find good translators. Titsingh is famous for his expertise in East Asian languages, but, as the director of the Spanish lodge, Manuel de Agote, notes in his diary, this will only help so much:

Previously, Mr Titsingh learned, during one or two voyages to Japan, Chinese characters, which are no different from the ones used in Japan, Tonkin, and Cochinchina, with the sole difference that they are pronounced differently.... [B]ut although Mr Titsingh can understand the meaning of the characters, he isn't able to express himself in the Mandarin language of China, nor in any of the numerous dialects that exist in this vast imperium of China.¹³

In fact, the Spaniard overestimates Titsingh's linguistic abilities. Titsingh himself is quite humble about his Chinese, because he knows from experience how difficult the language is. He was able to learn Japanese syllabic writing and thought at first that he wouldn't have much trouble with Chinese characters. "In order to be better able to read Japanese books," he wrote to a Japanese friend, "I've begun learning the Chinese language. It is of course difficult, but I hope through zeal and application to succeed. Beginnings are always hard, but one makes progress from day to day. I don't let a single moment pass unused and hope to be able to write you a letter in Chinese within a few years."¹⁴ When he was transferred to Bengal, he hired a Chinese man from Batavia to tutor him and help him translate.¹⁵ Unfortunately, the man pronounced the characters so differently from

the Japanese that the collaboration fell apart.¹⁶ So Titsingh tried hiring a Chinese man who had actually been to the Netherlands and fully understood Dutch. Unfortunately, even though Titsingh offered a salary of a thousand rupees a year, the man declined, because he was making more as a comprador. “This was a blow,” Titsingh wrote.¹⁷

He persevered on his own, ordering dictionaries and grammars and translations of Confucius from Europe and borrowing books from other learned men in Asia. The famous William Jones lent him Fourmont’s Chinese grammar and, even more exciting, a strange old two-volume Chinese dictionary, which Titsingh copied by hand:¹⁸

It’s an extraordinary work, very old, the paper everywhere eaten through by worms, and the Latin is written so densely, and with so many abbreviations, that I often puzzle over a word for half an hour in order to understand the meaning. I’ve been poring over it for several months, starting at dawn each day, and it’s a most difficult task. Within a month, though, I’ll have finished, and I’ll be in possession of a work the like of which one is not likely to find anywhere else.¹⁹

Yet despite all his hard work, Chinese came extremely slowly. As he eventually wrote to the Japanese friend to whom he’d promised a Chinese letter, “I am discovering that one must learn [Chinese] in one’s youth. Now it has become very difficult. Even so, it’s better to spend my time with this than to waste it on trivial pursuits. Everything one learns stays with one wherever one goes.”²⁰

Yet he does know much more Chinese than Macartney or the other British who accompanied him, with the possible exception of George Staunton the younger, just 12 years old, who studied Chinese on the ship with Macartney’s translators (this is the boy to whom Titsingh gave a Japanese writing box). Titsingh knows enough of the language to appreciate the linguistic and cultural gulf he faces. The Beijing missionary Grammont felt that Macartney and his suite didn’t have a proper understanding of that gulf: “Like all foreigners who know China only through books, they don’t understand the conduct, practices, and etiquette of the court, and they had the even greater misfortune of having brought with them a Chinese interpreter who is even less informed than they are.”²¹

Titsingh has paid close attention to Grammont’s analysis and is therefore determined to find good translators. His top choice is a Frenchman named Chrétien-Louis-Joseph de Guignes, son of one of the most famous orientalists of Europe, Joseph de Guignes. Titsingh has long corresponded with Guignes senior, who wrote pioneering

treatises on the origins of the Huns and Turks as well as a theory about the Egyptian origins of the Chinese language. Guignes senior even helped publish one of Titsingh's letters to him, although Titsingh was irritated, because he didn't give permission and didn't have a chance to revise it to his high standards. (In addition, the publisher somehow got his name wrong: Britzing.) In any case, the old orientalist wrote Titsingh a letter about his son: "My son is currently in China, having been sent there by the Maritime Ministry. He occupies himself only with science, and even before leaving [France], he had already translated several passages of Chinese. Now he is perfecting his knowledge of this language ... I would be charmed if he might be able to form a relationship with you."²² That was years ago, and now the younger Guignes is said to be highly skilled in Chinese.

The younger Guignes, for his part, desperately needs the work. Initially, he did well in China, serving as an agent of the French crown, first as translator and later as royal representative, tasked with helping look out for French interests in Canton. This was a prestigious position, with opportunities for profit, but it became increasingly insecure after the French revolution in 1789. A year and a half ago, news arrived that the king of France had been executed and Great Britain had declared war on France. Since then, Guignes has received no support from Europe. His clothing is threadbare.²³

Titsingh has asked the viceroy to approve his hiring Guignes as secretary, but the answer has been a firm "no." The viceroy says too many officials in Beijing already know of Guignes, due, perhaps, to his connections with the French missionaries in court. The presence of a Frenchman in a Dutch mission might also cause suspicion, especially given the concerns about Titsingh's credentials.²⁴ Titsingh has remonstrated, but to no avail. Even the Chinese merchants of Canton seem to be opposed to Guignes, apparently fearing that if it's discovered that he's a Frenchman, officials in the court might extort money from them.²⁵

But the emperor's new edict changes Guignes's fate. Since no one in the capital can speak or read Dutch, the emperor has explicitly tasked Changlin with recruiting one or two Westerners who can understand Dutch characters and speak Chinese. At first, Changlin tries to hire a Chinese person for the task, ordering subordinates to look for translators in Macau.²⁶ But this takes time, and the emperor's edict specifies a desire for Europeans.

So Titsingh seizes the opportunity and asks Guignes whether he might accept the position of translator instead of secretary. Guignes says "no." He may be poor, but he won't lower himself to the position

of a mere interpreter, particularly since, he says, this vocation is not well regarded in China.²⁷ Titsingh says his rank can be officially listed as secretary. This is enough to persuade Guignes to sign on. Van Braam continues to refer to him as a translator, which may be one reason Guignes comes to hate the corpulent Dutchman. Titsingh also offers a position to one of Guignes's housemates, a young Frenchman named Agie, who agrees to sign on.

After Titsingh proposes them to the viceroy, the two Frenchmen are summoned to the palace of the Superintendent of Maritime Trade to be interviewed by the viceroy.²⁸ Guignes has spent many years in China, but he's rarely had a chance to enter Canton proper, and he's eager for a good look at the city. He's unimpressed. "None of the shops," he writes, "display any items of value or which aroused the slightest interest." Nor does he think much of the superintendent's palace. Its courtyard is vast, filled with soldiers, servants, and attendants, but it "lacks magnificence."²⁹

The viceroy and another official sit in chairs on a stage at the end of an open hall, with the superintendent seated nearby in his own chair. Other officials remain standing. The viceroy asks Agie and Guignes to explain the Dutch letter of credential for Titsingh. Although it's not clear that either Frenchman can actually read Dutch, they perform convincingly, and the viceroy approves their appointments. The interview ends with the customary cup of tea, and Guignes is pleased that the two Frenchmen are invited to sip theirs while seated a distance away from the viceroy, which marks them as superior to most other foreigners, who, considered to be merchants, aren't allowed to sit in the presence of high officials.³⁰

Titsingh is happy to have secured Guignes's services but complains that both Frenchmen will have to be supplied with everything they need, most notably travel clothes and new formal attire, so they can appear before the emperor. In general, clothing is turning out to be an unexpected expense, because the mission will proceed during the winter rather than in the spring. Guignes, Agie, Titsingh's German bodyguards, Titsingh's servants—everyone, including Titsingh himself, will need warm clothing, with expensive furs, because their existing wardrobes are suited for subtropical Canton. Titsingh must pay. His Chinese tailor hires thirty-two staff members.³¹ While they measure, cut, and sew, Titsingh oversees many other tasks, such as the preparation of the presents for the emperor, which must be finalized, inspected, packed, and loaded onto the special boats that the officials have sent, having chosen an auspicious day.

Packing is the hard part, because most of the trip to Beijing will take place over land. Usually travelers go to the capital by way of the

Lower Yangtze region, floating comfortably through a network of rivers and canals almost all the way to Beijing. But because the emperor wants them there before New Year's, they'll take a faster route, directly northward, much of which is by land. This is much more arduous. The baggage and presents will be carried by porters and must be carefully crated, especially the delicate clocks and huge mirrors, for which special mechanisms are designed so that the chests will always be set down right side up.³²

There are also personal preparations to make. What if Titsingh should die during the voyage? He composes letters with careful instructions about what to do in the event of his death, and he considers how many copies should be sent out by how many different ships to ensure safe arrival.³³

He must also make dozens of personnel decisions, each of which requires careful thought. Van Braam's nephew, Jacob Andries van Braam, wants to be Titsingh's secretary, but Titsingh is wary. Is it good to have a Van Braam so intimately involved in his business? He denies the request. The elder Van Braam insists that his nephew accompany the expedition, so Titsingh agrees to make him part of the suite, as an independent gentleman.³⁴ As for a secretary, Titsingh wants a young man surnamed Zeeman, a solid and conscientious worker, but Zeeman is courting Mr. Dozy's daughter and doesn't want to leave the Canton area.³⁵ Later it will turn out that he turned down the job for nothing. The engagement breaks down, and the daughter sails for the Cape of Good Hope, which makes Zeeman and his friends furious at Dozy, threatening "the unity and goodwill so necessary for a well-regulated household and true-hearted management."³⁶

For his secretary, Titsingh chooses Mr. Dozy's son, one of the hardest working and most qualified young men in the Dutch lodge. In fact, the younger Dozy feels he's overqualified. He should by rights be sitting on the Canton lodge's executive board (the so-called China Commission), which he would be if his father hadn't been slandered by his enemies. Nonetheless, young Dozy accepts the position of secretary, but then others become upset. Mr. Bagman and Mr. Bletterman complain that one of them should have the honor. Titsingh says they've had plenty of time to apply for the job, and it's too late now.³⁷ There are many such decisions to make, and each one risks hurt feelings and jealousies. Members of the lodge are starting to dislike him.

Even as he prepares for his voyage, he's also supposed to be carrying out investigations, writing reports, collecting past-due taxes on employees' earnings, and, beyond all of this, keeping an eye on the purchase, packing, and loading of the cargoes for Europe.³⁸ Days

are spent in meetings. Evenings are spent at his desk, where he writes until eleven, and then sits alone on the stoop, smoking a final pipe before bed.³⁹

He apologizes for the short letters he writes to family and friends, complaining about the journey. To one friend, he writes, "I look with fear upon the dreary prospect of making this voyage in such a bitterly cold season. I'm trying in these too-rushed preparations to acquire fur clothes to help me endure against the biting cold, which is said to surpass that of Europe, but I fear that it will be difficult."⁴⁰ To his brother, he writes, "it frightens me when I think about it."⁴¹ He's particularly worried about leaving his son, recalling how the boy felt when Titsingh left him in Macau. If Titsingh were able to leave in March, as planned, he would have had a chance to return to Macau and say goodbye. "Now," Titsingh writes, "I'll have to leave him behind like a castaway."⁴²

But there's no changing the emperor's plans. On the morning of November 20, 1794, a boat pulls up to the stone quay in front of the Dutch lodge. It's meant to transport Titsingh on the first stages of his journey to Beijing, but Titsingh hates it: too drafty and ordinary looking. He refuses to embark until they provide a better one.

Officials respond that a small boat is just what's needed, because the rivers are low this year. He replies that he doesn't mind the size. It's the ugliness and dirtiness he objects to.⁴³ They beg him to get in, just for today, to take him to the farewell banquet, promising to find him a better one for the voyage itself. So he and his suite climb in and cross to the other side of the river, going again to Haizhuang Temple.

News of the expedition has spread, and this time the courtyard is packed with soldiers, and crowds of onlookers press forward to look at the Dutchmen. The decorations are even more ornate, a sign that the ambassador stands high in the emperor's favor. He and Van Braam take their seats near the viceroy and other officials.

While attendants serve soup and tea, Viceroy Changlin makes a speech. He says he is sorry about the difficulties they'll have to experience during their voyage in such a cold season but notes that the emperor has ordered his officials in the provinces to do all they can to make their trip comfortable. He only hopes that they have enough warm clothes to endure the bitter weather.⁴⁴ Titsingh and Van Braam thank him and say they're used to cold in their own country, where the winters can be as severe as those of Beijing.

Changlin mentions the banquets and celebrations that await the ambassadors in the capital and promises that although the voyage to Beijing will be rushed, the voyage home will be more leisurely, and

they'll have a chance to see some sights of China. He hopes and trusts they'll return safely and in perfect health to Canton, when he'll hold a party in their honor. He asks if the ambassador is ready to depart. Titsingh says yes. There are more solicitous questions and cordial answers. The soup is delicious.

A gong rings at the temple entrance. Cymbals crash, and horns call. Everyone stands and files out into the courtyard, the Europeans gathering on one side, officials on the other. Soldiers march through the gate, followed by twenty men in imperial yellow, who are followed in turn by eight yellow-clad porters who carry a yellow altar with a tube draped in yellow silk: the imperial letter. Behind it, porters carry another platform with a vase of burning incense. Everyone falls to their knees. The letter is brought into the tent and carefully placed on the temple's altar, near the imperial tablet.

Titsingh and Van Braam kneel on cushions directly in front of the altar, and the great officials array themselves to the side. An official steps forward and stands in front of the ambassadors, while another carefully removes the golden tube from the rack and carries it forward, held above his head, and hands it up to the viceroy with both hands. The viceroy unties the silk covering, unfurls the letter, and hands it to the standing man, who holds it above his head and reads aloud. Titsingh is struck by the rhythmic cadences. A kneeling interpreter translates. How he renders the emperor's words isn't recorded, but the emperor's edict reads as follows:

Changlin and others have submitted word that Holland sends an ambassador with a memorial to submit tribute. They implore permission to enter the capital and kowtow [to express their] best wishes. This is a good thing. Opening and reading Changlin et al.'s translation of the original document, [one sees that] that country's king, seeing that next year is the sixtieth anniversary of my accession to the throne, wants to join in the jubilation celebration and that a special tributary ambassador has been sent to carry the letter to the capital and kowtow in congratulation. The sentiments and words are extremely respectful and suitable. Because this document is from the great minister [of the] Company, Nederburgh, as well as others, who write on behalf of King William and thus not entirely in accordance with our system [i.e., our diplomatic practices], Changlin and the others have conducted considerable extra examination. But there is no need to go into such depth and discussion. I say that it is allowed that [the ambassador] come to the capital and present [himself] to the emperor, to satisfy this sincere feeling of admiration.⁴⁵

After the proclamation is finished, the ambassadors and officials kowtow "three times three," as Titsingh puts it.⁴⁶

Now the ceremony is over and the fun can begin. The viceroy and others congratulate Titsingh and Van Braam for the emperor's clear sign of favor and then direct their attention to the other tent, where dozens of dishes are arranged on tables: grapes and other fruits, sweets, and many bottles of Chinese drink, everything beautifully presented in the Chinese style. But this meal is just for show. The real one will be served in the gardens next door, accompanied by plays and performances.

The mandarins take their leave, and the Dutch are escorted into the garden, where they find their countrymen from the lodge. It's a magnificent meal.⁴⁷ Guignes, who isn't invited to the ceremony or the meal afterward, grumbles about the fact that the viceroy didn't even dine with them, but Titsingh doesn't mind.⁴⁸ He merely records how pleased he was with the kind and solicitous leave taking and the luxurious meal.⁴⁹ He enjoys himself until six o'clock, when an official accompanies the gentlemen back over the red carpet to their boats.

The following day is spent finishing packing, and Titsingh is trying to prepare for all contingencies. The emperor and his officials are supposed to supply food and lodging, and they've promised that the Dutch will enjoy the best treatment, but Mr. Browne, chief of the British lodge, has told Titsingh that Lord Macartney had a terrible experience traveling in China. People who saw his lordship before his departure to Beijing said that when he got back, he looked like he'd aged ten years. Mr. Browne says he only recognized Macartney because he still wore on his chest the big golden Star of the Order of the Bath.⁵⁰ Titsingh knows that his own route is likely to be more difficult, because it will proceed overland.

So he and Van Braam pack carefully. They bring their own beds and bedding, oil and butter, cooking tools, hats and coats, shoes and gloves. Wigs and powder are starting to go out of style, but they bring them anyway, knowing that the Chinese like to see Europeans in traditional coiffures. Maybe most important of all, they pack plenty of alcohol, so they won't be forced to drink Chinese wines and spirits. For much of the voyage, these heavy crates will be carried by porters, because in most parts of China, humans are used for transport more than animals are.

That night, Mr. Dozy, who has taken over as director of the Dutch lodge, gives them a farewell dinner, inviting the English and other foreigners, and the next morning, November 22, 1794, the final items are loaded onto the boats.⁵¹

Titsingh finds his new boat only a minor improvement over the last one, but he's told he'll get a better one in a few days.⁵² Van Braam gets a boat to himself. His nephew must share with one other

person, the mission's doctor, Johannes Hendrik Bletterman. Guignes is angry that he'll have to share with the two youngest gentlemen, Mr. Dozy and Mr. Agie. Guignes was a once a consul for the French king and now he's crowded into this boat with people clearly below his station.⁵³ His indignation extends to the departure ceremony itself: "During our departure, one saw no quays full of soldiers, as was the case at the arrival of Lord Macartney, and we heard no music or fireworks."⁵⁴

Titsingh hears the fireworks and enjoys seeing the crowd gathered on the quay to see him off: merchants and officials, Chinese and Europeans.⁵⁵ Many climb into boats to accompany him on the first part of the voyage.

This festive flotilla sets off at around one o'clock, and it's a grand sight. The official fleet has thirty vessels in all, twelve for Titsingh and his entourage and servants and soldiers, and the rest for the Qing escorts and their huge staffs. They fly golden pennants from lofty masts.

All the boats—official and unofficial—don't go far at first. They stop just three miles away from the lodges to explore Flowerland (花地), where visitors can, for a fee, explore beautiful gardens of flowers, shrubs, and dwarf trees.⁵⁶ The ambassador's suite doesn't have to pay, of course. Titsingh and the others wander between rows of flowerpots standing on low platforms. "The number and variety of them," Titsingh writes, "and the art with which the Chinese excelled in the forcing and leading of trees was astonishing."⁵⁷ He's glad that Macartney wasn't allowed to stop here.

But their Flowerland sojourn is short. All too soon they must say goodbye to their comrades from the lodges and reembark. They're going to have to move quickly to make it to Beijing before New Year's.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Imperial Way

BY BOAT THROUGH SOUTHERN CHINA

TITSINGH CAN TRACE previous voyagers' routes in the books he's brought along, the most famous of which is *Embassy to the Grand Tartar* by Johan Nieuhof, who accompanied the first European diplomatic embassy to Beijing, a Dutch mission of 1655.¹ It has a large foldout map of China, where the names of each stop are written in such tiny letters that 49-year-old Titsingh may have to resort to his reading glasses. Most stops are along waterways, because Nieuhof floated nearly the entire way, sailing up the Pearl River network and then, after a short jog by land, downstream to the great river port of Nanchang. From Nanchang, Nieuhof reached the Yangtze River, which took him to the Grand Canal, which then conducted him almost all the way to Beijing. Most other travelers have followed similar itineraries, gliding through the beautiful, populous Lower Yangtze Region. It's a pleasant route, but indirect, veering far to the east.

That's too slow for the emperor, who wants Titsingh in Beijing within six weeks, so the ambassador will follow a more direct path. The first part of his journey will be the same as Nieuhof's: Up the Pearl River and its tributaries to Nanxiong and then a brief jog overland to Nan'an, where the party will acquire new boats to proceed by river to Nanchang. But after Nanchang, his route will

diverge. Whereas Nieuhof and other predecessors continued by water, Titsingh will leave his boat behind and go overland all the way to Beijing, through the icy northern Chinese winter.



MAP 3 Dutch embassy's journey by boat from Canton, Guangdong, to Nanchang, Jiangxi, and then by land from Nanchang, Jiangxi, as far as Guuzhen, Anhui. *Source:* Cox Cartographic, Ltd.

This is the “dreadful prospect” Titsingh had hoped to avoid, but there’s nothing to do except try to enjoy the first part of the voyage, while the weather’s mild and he has a boat of his own. It has a

stateroom and a bedroom, and it flies the imperial flag, which makes soldiers at the guardhouses fall to their knees and beat cymbals and fire guns as it passes. This is gratifying at first, but there's a guardhouse every ten li (three miles), and the guns and cymbals don't stop at night.

To make it worse, the rowers won't stop shouting. Guignes finds it unbearable: "Our first night wasn't happy because our sailors, to encourage themselves in their rowing, let out such lamentable cries that they kept us awake for a very long time."² Titsingh feels bad for the rowers: "Since they must work against the current, this caused great difficulties for the boathands. They worked all night through, sometimes pulling towlines, and other times poling, which, combined with their constant yelling, granted us little rest."³ Sometimes the rowers disembark to pull the boats, which means less screaming, but even so, as Guignes writes, "our slumber was interrupted each time our boats passed in front of a corps-de-garde."⁴

Yet Guignes can't help but admire these laborers. "They work," he writes "like devils," yelling all the way.⁵ Van Braam feels that the Chinese are unique in their work ethic:

It was impossible to behold without astonishment the indefatigable zeal which our sailors manifested night and day, and almost without taking rest, for its farther acceleration. Three times in the four and twenty hours they make a meal, which lasts little more than a quarter of an hour, and get but very little sleep. They do their business nevertheless with vigour, and with a degree of gaiety which in other parts of the world is only to be met with upon parties of pleasure. No being on earth is fitter than the Chinese to endure fatigue and to support a long continuance of labour.⁶

While the workers yell and the soldiers bang and shoot, the travelers look out the drafty windows of their boats. With its colorful pennants, the fleet is a lovely sight, especially when the sails are raised, and the land abounds with green rice paddies, colorful temples, tall towers, and hills planted with tea-seed bushes blooming white.⁷ Most breathtaking are the mountains, which rise precipitously out of the water, looming over the green fields. Titsingh has never seen anything like them.⁸ His companions are equally effusive.⁹ Even grumpy Guignes likes them.

At times, these mountains come right down to the river, creating narrow passes. Two days after setting out from Canton, the fleet enters a steep gorge near Qingyuan (清遠). "The terrible steepness of the cliffs," Titsingh writes, "the high and bare mountains on either side, along which there was only a narrow path for the boat hands,

the narrowness and darkness of the passage, and the few little hovels that are preserved here and there—all of this was somber but, in a sense, pleasant.”¹⁰ Van Braam finds the cliffs “noble and sublime,” describing the towering walls, the way the shallow river winds and twists like a snake.¹¹ In the middle of this passage stands the Flying Temple (飛來寺), an uncanny tower on top of a tall hill that is said to have flown to the hilltop long ago and alighted there. “It seems,” scoffs Guignes, “that in China one loves the miraculous.”¹² They emerge from this passage to lovely wooded hills, below which, through the trees, they glimpse a village, a pagoda, and a military checkpoint. Farther off, the horizon is hidden by bluish mountains. The water is clear, and the travelers agree that it’s good to drink, although the boatmen warn them that there are tigers in the mountains.¹³

Some mountain passages are so dangerous that the fleet pauses, giving up speed for safety.¹⁴ One such gorge is reached the day they see the Flying Temple. It’s not long. Van Braam notes that “a stone might be thrown from one end to the other.” But the rocks are so tall and steep that, as Van Braam writes, “they cannot fail to inspire the beholder with a sentiment of fear.”¹⁵

Some scenes remind Titsingh of Japan. He recalls seeing Japanese fishing with trained birds, and here Chinese fishermen do the same. Their birds are the size of geese, black, with long curved beaks and webbed feet. They’re well trained, requiring no lines or leashes. They dive on command, capture a fish, and return to their master. If they swallow it, the master makes them regurgitate by pressing on their crop, doling out small pieces of fish as a reward.¹⁶ This practice impresses Sinophilic Van Braam: “This singular mode of fishing is no small proof of the industry of the Chinese, especially when it is known that the invention of it belongs to one of the lower classes of the nation.”¹⁷

Unfortunately, Titsingh doesn’t get to enjoy the scenery as much as he’d like, because he’s writing reports and letters. He has only a few days to finish them, and the only reason he even has this opportunity is that his tailor has hired a boat and is following along with his employees sewing madly. Titsingh will be able to send his letters and reports back with the tailor when he returns to Canton.

Titsingh’s letters ruminate about “dark times” ahead.¹⁸ The latest newspapers and pamphlets are ominous, describing how the French revolutionaries—those king killers—aren’t cowed by the huge alliance against them. His homeland, the Dutch Republic, is the smallest member of this alliance, and the most vulnerable, from without and within. The Dutch government has increased taxes to

pay the King of Prussia, whose troops are doing most of the fighting. The common people are getting angry and might rise up, led by the Dutch Patriots, who tried to establish a revolutionary state in the Netherlands in the 1780s and are still active. As Titsingh puts it, the embers still smolder beneath the ashes, and any event could lead to a new conflagration. “May God prevent this,” he writes, “because our severely tested fatherland might then be utterly destroyed.”¹⁹ It’s a prescient comment. The Dutch Republic will indeed be destroyed while Titsingh is in Beijing. For now, he just wonders where he would find refuge.²⁰ Would he have to stay in Batavia once he returns from Beijing? It’s an unpleasant thought, although that’s what the company’s leadership would prefer. Before he left Batavia, the governor general confided that he would soon retire and that no one was more capable of taking his place than Titsingh.²¹ “However flattering this is for me,” he writes to his brother, “I know the Indies too well not to plan a safe and timely retreat.”²² Yet retreat to where? Europe is at war. The Dutch empire in Asia is in steep decline.

When his predecessor, Johan Nieuhof, passed along this river 140 years ago, the Dutch were flourishing and expanding: Nieuhof opened his book with a triumphant history of the Dutch East India Company: Wars won, colonies founded, the British defeated and outcompeted. In those days, Batavia was a fresh “draught,” a “Famous and Eminent” city, “fruitful in all manner of cattle and corn.”²³ Now the company is outmaneuvered by the British, while Batavia is “in irrevocable decline,” as Titsingh writes to his brother.²⁴

Yet here in China, things are better than they were when Nieuhof wrote. In Nieuhof’s days, these lovely lands, filled with sugar plantations and tea-oil bushes, were desolate, the towns burned and abandoned. The Manchus had only recently occupied Beijing, and the signs of war were all around. “These unmerciful Tartars,” Nieuhof wrote, “have not only laid waste abundance of noble Cities, Towns, and Villages (which are now places for Birds and Beasts to roost in) but they have likewise made Slaves of the best of the Natives.”²⁵ Little did he know that much of the destruction was caused by the Manchus’ enemies, who were fighting to restore the Ming dynasty.

In any case, the China that Titsingh sees out his windows seems peaceful, and he wishes he had time to join his comrades on their long walks through the countryside to explore mountain temples, hike through rice paddies, examine brick kilns, taste wild strawberries, and watch buffaloes drinking from streams. “They’re very dangerous,” notes Guignes, but fortunately, the beasts usually have their minders with them.²⁶

Walled towns or cities are generally off limits, but Van Braam

exercises his charm:

Perceiving the city of Sanshui (三水) situated in a valley at a little distance from the waterside, I directed my solitary steps towards it. When I came to the gate, a sentinel gave me to understand that I could not be admitted. But making him comprehend in my turn, with all the politeness I was master of, that he had no reason for fear, I took him by the arm, and desired him by signs to accompany me. To this he consented.²⁷

Van Braam walks through several streets, which, although paved in broad stones, are in poor condition. The houses are old, low, and “crazy.” The shops, displaying their foodstuffs, are poor. He manages to find the mandarin’s palace but isn’t brave enough to stick around. He takes a quick glance and then hurries back to his boat.²⁸

The travelers are allowed considerable freedom. One evening, for example, they visit a sugar processing plant. Van Braam has seen operations like this before—the area around Batavia is full of them—but Guignes is fascinated: the two buffaloes turning the wheel, the man feeding the sugar cane between the mill wheels, the sweet effluent flowing through a conduit into a hole in the base, the sugar solution boiling in large vats, and its formation into cakes. He tastes and finds it excellent, although he scoffs at the little shrine that stands outside it, near the sugarcane fields. It honors a guardian god of the countryside, but, he notes, its “power was unable to prevent our boathands from entering into the sugar fields and stealing a good provision.”²⁹

As for the Europeans, they have no need to steal provisions. They’re fed well: delicious pears, apples, and purple grapes, old but tasty. To be sure, Titsingh is used to long, luxurious midday dinners, with many courses, followed by a languid pipe and a glass of sherry, and he complains that there’s sometimes only one meal each day, and too short.³⁰ When Nieuhof traveled, he and his fellows stopped for several days at various riverports and dined at their leisure, although sometimes the towns were in ruins, so the meal took place outside the walls. In the once-great city of Shaozhou (韶州), for example, he and his comrades ate outside in tents, because inside the walls was “nothing but Ruine and a heap of stones.”³¹

When Titsingh gets to Shaozhou, the city has recovered its bustle, regaining its status as a vital transshipment point. It stands on a narrow spit of land at the junction of two tributaries, its walls overgrown with greenery, allowing a glimpse of just a few ornate rooftops.³² Innumerable vessels ply its waters: boats from the north stopping to transfer cargo to larger boats heading south; boats from

the south transferring to smaller boats headed north. The locals are also frequently afloat, carrying products like linen and oil or ferrying people around. Last year, the British gentleman George Staunton passed through here and was shocked that the ferries were piloted by young women, who dress “neatly” in an attempt to attract the attention of the male travelers, who are often alone and far from their families. The girls do this, he wrote, with the blessing of their own parents, who take no other interest in the chastity of their daughters than that which might be required to marry them off to wealthy husbands.³³ If wealthy husbands cannot be procured, the parents are content to “devote them to one employment, with a view to the profits of another.”³⁴ For Staunton, vexed by his treatment in Beijing (he’d expected to stay on as permanent ambassador there), it’s just another sign of how depraved and uncivilized the Chinese are.

Titsingh and Van Braam are treated warmly. Shaozhou houses a prefectural government and is the most important place they’ve visited since leaving Canton a week ago. Soldiers fire musket salutes on the riverbank, and Titsingh finds that the music has “something pleasant about it.”³⁵ People press forward to catch a glimpse, showing surprisingly little respect for the officials. Guards keep them back, threatening to hit them, allowing Titsingh and the others to disembark at a ceremonial pavilion and walk along a covered red-carpet path to the grand city gatehouse.³⁶ The great gate is opened, and the visitors are led through a small courtyard into a large room, where seats have been prepared. They recognize the city’s governor, who was present at the departure ceremony a week ago. He greets them kindly and offers tea. They ask to see the city, but he demurs, saying there’s nothing worth seeing. The streets are narrow, he says, the houses unimpressive.³⁷

It takes remarkably little time for stevedores to unload their boats and load the new ones, which are longer and narrow, better suited for the shallow and dangerous conditions ahead. Guignes finds his more commodious, but Titsingh asks for another.³⁸ He gets his wish and finds the new boat small but pretty.³⁹

The fleet, now containing twice the number of vessels as before, glides beneath crumbling walls that have miserable huts built against them, and passes through the town’s water gate, a narrow archway whose passage can be closed with chains.⁴⁰ Onlookers stare down from the windows of a huge customs building and from the stone quays with their crumbling stairs.

But something is wrong. Apparently, the officials in charge of the embassy haven’t paid proper wages, and the sailors are running away

from nearly every boat except Titsingh's (he's a good tipper). Guards yell and slap and punch, but to little affect. It's dark by the time there are enough crewmembers to get underway again. The fleet goes just a short way before midnight, when it stops to let the sailors rest.⁴¹

The next day, the fleet works its way upstream along the muddy Zhen River (滇江), a tributary of the Pearl River that is a main artery to northern China. It winds through steep hills and mountains, often turning back on itself, past fishers' huts with nets hanging from posts, rice paddies, fallen towers, and fields where peasants squat, passing dirt through sieves to harvest peanuts. The local women wear straw hats with holes in the back to put their hair through, which Guignes notes don't shade their faces enough to keep them very white.⁴²

It's getting cooler. Titsingh's thermometer reads fifty-two degrees Fahrenheit, and the north wind blows through his boat's drafty windows. The other gentlemen warm themselves with walks through bamboo-shaded villages, meeting soldiers and curious crowds. Sometimes locals press in so close and in such numbers that the travelers rush back to their boats for safety, but usually they feel safe. They sniff odorless violets, stroll across picturesque bridges, and encounter other travelers, such as a man hanging from a strange bamboo stretcher.⁴³

Often they go faster than their boats, which make slow progress against the swift brown current and treacherous sandbars. The cooks' boats, with the heavy kitchen supplies, fall behind. Meals become irregular. Supplies also become scarce. The official escorts are supposed to supply the food, but Titsingh's staff complains that the provisions are fewer than before, and Titsingh notices his servings getting smaller, which is odd, because anyone can see the large amounts of food that are loaded each day when the boats stop for supplies. He suspects that much is being diverted to the escorts, and his chief steward says that the Chinese have offered him two piasters each day if he'll skimp on meals for the staff.⁴⁴

After three days on the Zhen River, they reach Nanxiong City (南雄), where they'll abandon their boats to hike up the mountains and down into the upper reaches of the Yangtze River watershed. The town's officials welcome them ashore near a rickety bridge, and while they sip tea, hundreds of porters load their backs with all the luggage, bedding, alcohol, stoves, pots and pans, clothes, and so forth, not to mention the emperor's gifts, which include delicate clocks and cumbersome mirrors. Eighty people are needed to carry the mirrors alone.⁴⁵ They'll have to carry everything all the way up to Meiling Pass, which marks the boundary between Guangdong and Jiangxi Provinces, and then down again to Nan'an Prefecture (南安), a

distance of more than twenty miles.

Not only is the job physically difficult, it's also a logistical challenge. How to hire and coordinate the hundreds of laborers and ensure that nothing is lost? The city of Nanxiong is filled with businesses specializing in this work. Typically, one visits one of these establishments and provides a list—how many bales of this and crates of that—and then seals a contract: so many coppers for so many pounds carried for such-and-such a distance. The wages are low—one or two coppers per catty from one city to another (a catty is roughly a pound).⁴⁶ The business then contracts with the porters, giving each a note of what he or she is to carry. When the porter reaches the city of Nan'an, on the other side of the pass, he or she will hand this note to the business's sister office to receive payment.⁴⁷

Nearly all the goods that move between Nanxiong and points inland are carried on their backs: fuel oil, tobacco, tea, porcelain, silk. It's said that some can carry 160 pounds for twenty-five miles in one day.⁴⁸ Many of the porters are women.⁴⁹ Some have carrying poles, with posts hanging down so that when they stop, they can balance the load at shoulder level and don't have to heave it up again. Guignes makes a sketch.

The loading is an efficient process, carried out with "a very exact order," but what most surprises Van Braam is how these people are trusted to carry such valuable items:

It is very surprising that the coolies, who are from the poorest and most impoverished class of the people of China, and who are reduced, from lack of other opportunities, to earning their daily bread by such painful work, transport the most precious merchandise from one city to another without any inspection, with each individual receiving in person that which he will transport (except in such cases that a heavier load might require more than one carrier). They pick up the merchandise in one place and deliver it to another, and they carry out this duty with a scrupulous exactitude. Is there any place in Europe where one would entrust objects of such great value to poor people who are scarcely known to one to be carried for such far distances!?⁵⁰

Not all the burdens are inanimate. Titsingh and Van Braam climb into palanquins they've brought from Canton. Their porters work in four-person teams, one team carrying while the others rest, either walking or in carts.⁵¹ In this way, they can proceed at a pace so fast that, Van Braam feels, no European could keep up.⁵²

Titsingh's palanquin is preceded by two officials on horseback, a troop of soldiers, a man carrying a parasol, his own honor guard, and Qing guards with whips to keep the crowds away. Van Braam also

receives an armed escort, but not Guignes. A group of people approaches his flimsy palanquin and tears away the thin fabric to look at him. His porters manage to get him away from the crowds and across the precarious bridge, following a long, narrow road lined with shops. He's relieved when they finally leave the town through a gate with a huge gatehouse. Titsingh is invited to have tea in a hall here, but not Guignes, whose porters carry him right past.

Guignes is hungry, not having eaten since the previous day. He's also upset. He asked for a horse and was told he'd have to content himself with this palanquin, but then he noticed people on horseback who are below him in status: the expedition's clockmaker and one of its translators. "One sees," he writes, "that the Chinese lie with impunity. When one wants to obtain something from them that they should or can give, it is necessary not to leave one's place until its been provided."⁵³

The road toward the mountains is lovely. There are roadside stands with quaint thatched roofs, where you can buy tea and refreshments. Titsingh and Van Braam get some, but not Guignes.

In the early afternoon, the travelers ascend between pine-covered hills. Rice grows in the lower areas, and here and there they see clusters of houses. The road is wide and paved with stones.⁵⁴ It winds around the hills, sometimes ascending and sometimes descending but never level. Even Titsingh gets out and walks, relieved that his letters and reports are finished and on their way to Canton with his tailor.

Guignes walks to warm himself against the wind, but he's too hungry and climbs aboard again. An hour and a half later, he's finally offered a "measly meal."⁵⁵ The food is cold, and the pieces are too large. He hacks off a wing of chicken with a pocket knife and eats it with some steamed buns (or, as he calls it, "uncooked bread").⁵⁶ Titsingh and Van Braam have a delightful meal with attentive service.⁵⁷

After lunch, the road becomes steeper, climbing along a canyon between two ridges. Sometimes sharp switchbacks climb steep faces. They pass villages, guardhouses, and a leaning pavilion that Guignes thinks will soon collapse. In the late afternoon, they reach the base of Mei Mountain (梅嶺), gateway to Jiangxi Province and the Yangtze Watershed.⁵⁸



FIGURE 4. Porters with carrying poles. The travelers were impressed by the men and women who carried so much, so fast, and under such difficult circumstances, and they paid close attention to the various devices the porters used to make their work more bearable, such as these resting poles, which saved the effort of lifting burdens up again after a pause.

Source: Chrétien-Louis-Joseph de Guignes, *Voyage à Péking, Manille et l'île de France: faits dans l'intervalle des années 1784 à 1801*, Vol 4 (Atlas) (Paris: Treuttel & Würtz, 1808), detail from image 31. Public domain.

Guignes has looked forward to seeing this peak, which an escorting official told him is so high that it's "lost in the clouds." He scoffs. The mountain is of "mediocre" height, no taller than Mount Valérien, a hill in Paris. The mandarin's exaggerated words were "totally in the Asiatic style."⁵⁹

Near the top is a temple to Confucius, where Titsingh and Van Braam are offered tea and almond milk while the porters rest, although, Titsingh writes, "the climb up the mountain wasn't very difficult."⁶⁰ Soon, they arrive at the Meiling Pass, a narrow passage carved between the mountains, where a stone gateway marks the boundary between Guangdong and Jiangxi provinces.

The view on the other side is stunning.⁶¹ A vast plain spreads out below, filled with farms. Here and there one can see graveyards. Brightly uniformed soldiers are waiting to escort them down to Nan'an City.

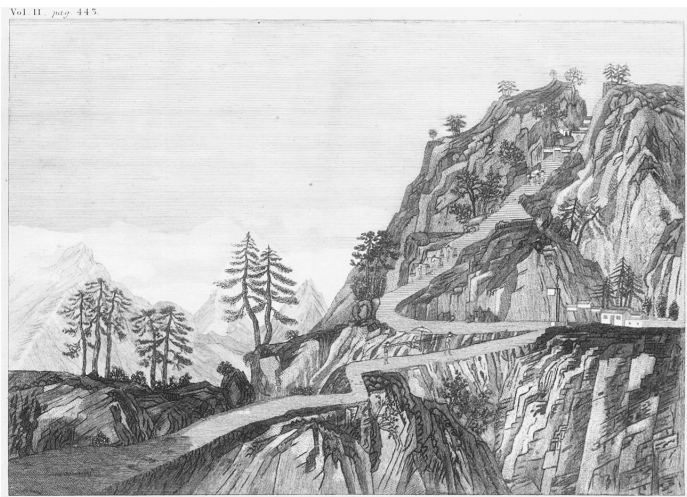


FIGURE 5. The Meiling Mountains. “Meiling Mountain, Nan’an Side” (梅嶺腳南安), c. 1794. This engraving is based on a painting by a Chinese artist in Canton that was commissioned by A. E. van Braam Houckgeest. The Meiling Pass marked the boundary between Guangdong and Jiangxi Provinces and between the Pearl River watershed and the Yangtze River watershed.

Source: Engraving from André Everard van Braam Houckgeest, *Voyage de l’ambassade de la Compagnie des Indes Orientales Hollandaises, vers l’empereur de la Chine, dans les années 1794 & 1795*, Vol 2 (Philadelphia: M.L.E. Moreau de Saint-Méry, 1798), 443. Public domain.

Notes: This engraving isn’t identified as the Meiling Pass, but its close similarity to an image from the Peabody Essex Collection of Chinese paintings believed to be part of Van Braam’s collection makes clear that it was. That image is titled “Meilingjiao Nan’an” (梅嶺腳南安), anonymous Chinese Artist, Guangzhou, China, Watercolor and Ink on Paper, 1790s, in *Albums of Paintings Commissioned by Andreas Everardus van Braam Houckgeest*, Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, MA. Museum purchase, 1943, AE86344.44, number 178.

It’s a dangerous descent, steep and winding, and in many places it runs along a cliff, where Van Braam worries about being dropped into “the unfathomable abyss full of sharp-pointed rocks.” Soldiers march next to the palanquins in case the porters stumble on the steep stone stairs.⁶²

Sometimes the view is blocked by thick forests, and the travelers hear water rushing down the mountainside. Other times, the travelers enjoy scenes of ricefields, pine trees, and mountain hamlets.⁶³

By the time they reach the bottom of the mountain, the sun is going down and there are many miles to go. They pass clusters of sad houses, made of earth or dry brick. Other settlements seem to consist solely of hostels for travelers. Occasionally they pass stone buildings, open on two sides, where porters shelter from storms. In various places, little stalls offer a place for travelers to “ease their needs,” from which Guignes infers that the villagers lack fertilizer. Guardhouses appear every ten li or so, where soldiers line up, arms

crossed. For high-ranking people, they fire muskets and get on their knees. For people like Guignes, they just beat on a copper drum.⁶⁴

It's dark by the time they reach Nan'an, and the gates are closed. They follow the walls, their torches flickering on dark suburbs, until eventually they come to a small walled compound: a public house, or gongguan (公館), where traveling officials spend the night.

The travelers will stay in many public houses, and this one's not bad. It stands near the river, not far from the customs house, and presents, to Van Braam, a "tolerable appearance."⁶⁵ Rows of small rooms flank a courtyard, at the end of which stands a large hall with a room on each side. The space isn't adequate for everyone in the party, so soldiers and servants stay in a building across the street.

It's the first night the travelers spend outside their boats, and it doesn't go well. Many the porters have trailed behind, including those carrying cooking supplies, so the travelers must, as Titsingh puts it, "content ourselves with a Chinese meal."⁶⁶ Two tables have been set up: one in a large room for Titsingh and Van Braam, and the other outside, for Guignes and the other gentlemen. "This arrangement," Guignes notes, "very much pleased Mr. Van Braam, who pretended that this was the usual procedure, but we put the two tables together and dined all together, as we had always done."⁶⁷ There are no knives or forks, just chopsticks, so they use clumsy porcelain spoons and the cook's large knife. "After this magnificent supper," Guignes writes, "we went to rest."⁶⁸

Public houses aren't equipped with bedding, but the travelers have read missionaries' reports and know that in China, one must carry one's own cushions and covers "or else be forced to lie on a hard mat."⁶⁹ They each packed bedding, but the porters carrying it haven't arrived yet. Attendants prepare a bed for Titsingh, and Van Braam fashions one with pillows from his palanquin, but Guignes and the other gentlemen have no recourse but to take the covers off some chairs and huddle together on a wooden platform against a cold wind blowing through the curtainless paper windows. Guignes blames the Chinese escorts and officials, warning anyone who might wish to venture into the interior of China to "take the precautions that are absolutely necessary with the Chinese, who ordinarily never forget themselves but very frequently forget others."⁷⁰

In the morning, the travelers decide to have a look at Nan'an, the first city they've encountered in the province of Jiangxi, but a crowd blocks the public house's gate, so they stay inside.

They wait all day for the rest of the porters to arrive, while curious people sneak into the complex, opening the door to their rooms to stare, letting the cold wind in. It's not until evening that the

baggage arrives and the travelers can leave the public house. Guards escort them through the crowds to the customs house plaza, which has been decorated with two colorful pavilions. Near them are moored the new boats.

These boats are different from those of Guangdong Province: long and shallow, curving sharply upward on both ends. In the front there's a little cabin for the crew, and the rest of the space is for the passengers and their things. A narrow deck runs along the side, allowing the crew to move around to row or work the sails. There's a place in the back for the pilot to manage the rudder, with a cozy roof over his head. Van Braam and Titsingh are pleased, finding the vessels clean and well appointed. Guignes feels that the vessel for him and his boatmates is too small. After many complaints, a larger boat is provided.

Officials explain that the boats here are smaller because the rivers are shallower, and they tell the travelers that they must leave some of their luggage here and pick it up on the way back. Even Titsingh and Van Braam are asked to do this. Titsingh refuses, suspicious that the officials are just trying to skim on transport costs. The officials back down and order the items to be loaded.

The boats move out onto the river with a strange wiggling motion, because one sailor rows on one side in front and another rows on the opposite side in the back. The odd motion makes it difficult to write or sketch, but at least they make fast progress. The Zhang River (章江) is swift, and they're headed downstream. Sometimes the boats run onto shallows, but they're designed for this: Their bows have special holes for poles to be inserted to help dislodge them.⁷¹

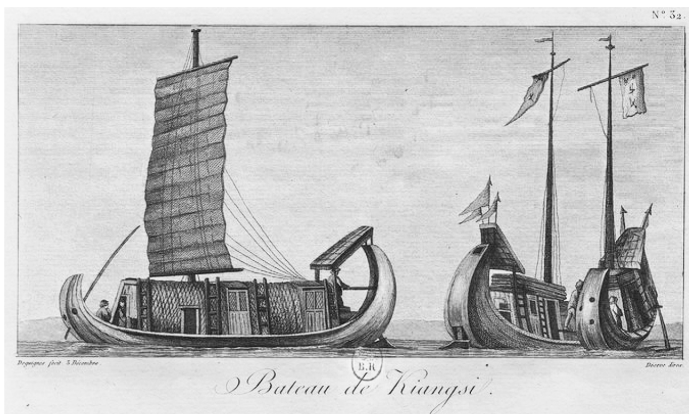


FIGURE 6. Boats of Jiangxi Province ("Bateau de Kiangsi"). This engraving, probably from an original sketch by Chrétien-Louis-Joseph de Guignes, depicts boats used in Jiangxi Province.

Each region of China had its own style of watercraft, suited for its particular conditions.
Source: From Chrétien-Louis-Joseph de Guignes, *Voyage à Péking, Manille et l'Île de France: faits dans l'intervalle des années 1784 à 1801*, Vol. 4 (Atlas) (Paris: Treuttel & Würtz, 1808), plate 32. Public domain.

The boats snake through the night and the following day, past sugarcane fields, sugar mills, oil presses, and huge waterwheels that carry water from the river to the fields, so sturdy and cheap and practical that Van Braam finds “new proof of the industry and intelligence of the Chinese.”⁷² He considers himself something of an expert on Chinese water pumps, having (or so he says) introduced Cantonese designs into the United States of America, “where they are of great utility in rivers, in consequence of the little labour they require.”⁷³ The only problem is that the industrious and intelligent Chinese make channels in the river to divert the water to their wheels, forcing the boats to carefully maneuver.⁷⁴

The river winds crazily back and forth, past brick kilns and hamlets nestled among copses of bamboo, until, on their third day in the new boats, they come to a picturesque town called Ganzhou (贛州), where the Zhang River joins the Gan River (贛江). On the busy quay, near stone river stairs, soldiers fire salutes and beat drums. The travelers are meant to go ashore, but thousands of curious people are surging forward. “Anyone would have supposed,” Van Braam wrote, “that they meant to attack our vessels.”⁷⁵ The travelers hide in their cabins and leave as soon as the boats are loaded with supplies.

To reach Wan'an (萬安), the next significant town, they must pass through the Eighteen Shoals (十八灘),⁷⁶ a dangerous narrow where, as an old poem notes, “strange rocks, sharp like iron, terrible and formidable, loom and interlock over the surface of the current.”⁷⁷ In his Nieuhof volume, Titsingh can read how “these terrible and dreadful cliffs” make the River Gan “most hazardous.”⁷⁸

The sailors need local pilots to navigate these “unmerciful bilgers,”⁷⁹ so they moor near a large village to recruit some. They also seek help from the Dragon King God (龍王), whose temple stands near a customs house.⁸⁰ Officials, captains, boathands, and stewards all go pray, beating gongs and burning paper spirit money.

They wait until the following morning, to ensure that they have plenty of light. When dawn comes, cold and clear, they drift out and enter the passage, flanked by high cliffs. Each shoal has a name—Teapot Shoal, Heaven's Pillar, Turtle Shoal, Floating Spirit Shoal, Terrifying Shoal.⁸¹ Some areas have so many rocks jutting up above the surface that there's only a narrow channel for the boats.

Fortunately, the Dragon King provides bright sun and calm waters.

It's the dry season and the river is low, making the rocks easy to see.⁸² Clouds begin to gather as the boats proceed, but the Dragon King waits until they emerge from the narrows before releasing the rain. He has another temple here, on this side, where the sailors and officials burn more spirit money to thank him.⁸³

From here, the sailors make rapid progress downriver, rowing and poling, singing and calling. Villagers sell sweet apples, and raftsmen yell at their birds. Bright days are for walking. Wet nights are for drifting cozily while rain patters on the roof. Sometimes the river broadens, and the travelers tie their boats together and dine as a group, enjoying views of fertile fields and prosperous villages.

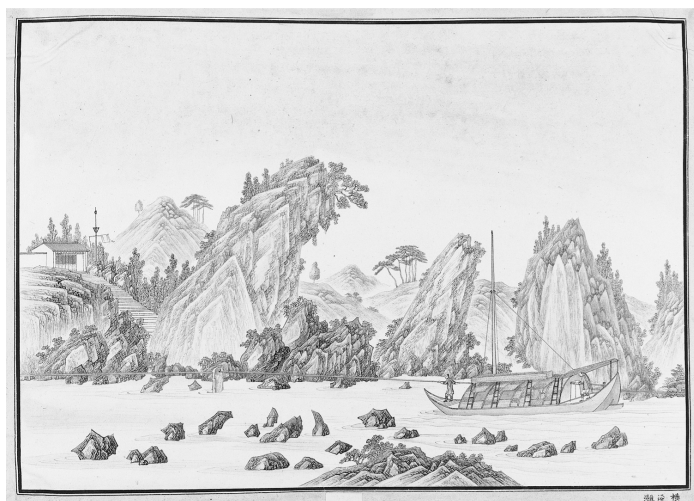


FIGURE 7. Eighteen Shoals. “Wang-in-than” (横延滩), one of the dangerous Eighteen Shoals near Ganzhou (赣州), China.

Source: By anonymous Chinese artist, Canton, China. Watercolor and ink on paper, 1790s, in Albums of Paintings Commissioned by Andreas Everardus van Braam Houckgeest. Courtesy of Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, MA. Museum purchase, 1943, AE86344.44, No. 44.

Notes: On the back of this painting is the following description: “Vue de Wang-in-than, passage de la rivière que la multitude des rochers rendent dangereux, qui est dans le district de la ville de Can-tchioe-fou.” I believe this is the same shoal as the slightly differently written 横延滩. (Can-tchioe-fou is 赣州府.)

Jiangxi Province seems to deserve its reputation as a place of fertile beauty. “In all the space my eyes could reach in every direction,” Van Braam writes, “there was not a single unpleasant point of view. On either bank of the river I could count a dozen hamlets, or villages, presenting themselves at the same moment to the eye. Externally everything wore the appearance of prosperity and happiness.”⁸⁴

But all things must pass. In Fengcheng (豐城), the stone quay is falling apart, and the welcome music is funereal. Guignes calls it “the most detestable I’ve ever heard in my life.”⁸⁵ The officials are kind, but everything looks sad, and the pears are hard, good only for baking.⁸⁶

After they leave, the scenery improves, but there’s little time to enjoy it. They’re busy packing all their things together. Tonight, on the fourth day after the Eighteen Shoals, they reach Nanchang City, where they’ll leave their boats behind.

They’ve traveled more than 400 miles. Beijing is still a thousand miles away, and they’ll have to travel the rest of the way by land. Titsingh doesn’t expect it to be easy, but he has no idea how bad it will get.

CHAPTER EIGHT

A Walk into Winter

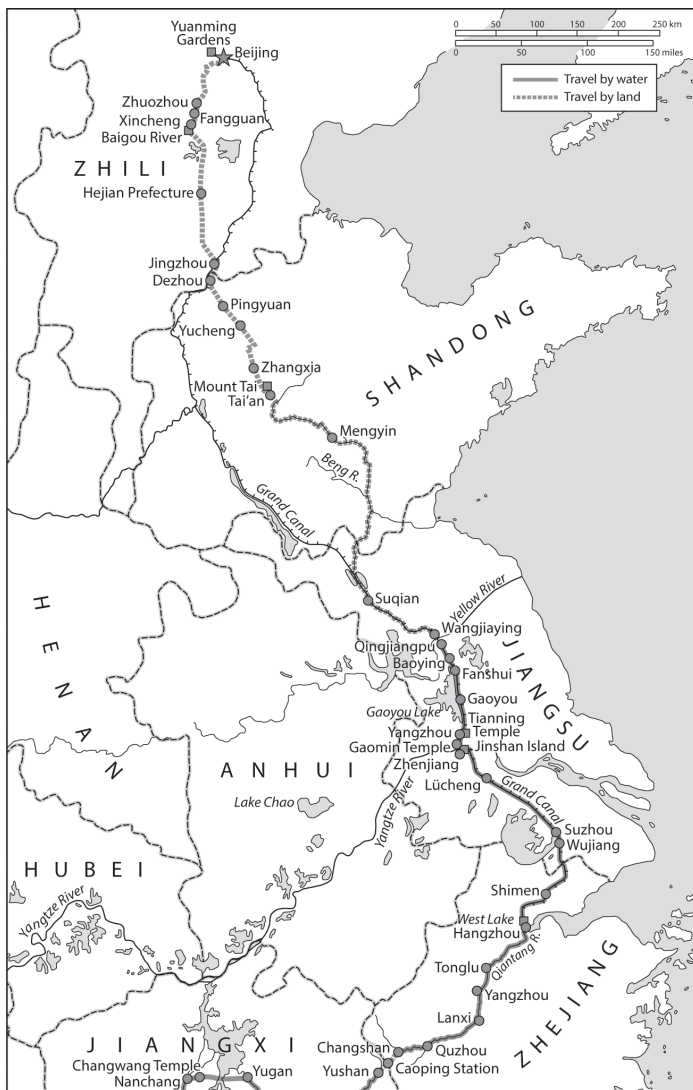
NANCHANG IS FAMOUS FOR PORCELAIN, an ancient tower, and a well full of dragons who might at any time let loose a flood that will destroy the universe. It's a key port connecting southern China to the Yangtze River, and if the travelers weren't so pressed for time, they'd stay here for a while and then float past it into the wealthiest and most beautiful parts of the empire, where they'd see cities like Hangzhou, known for stunning parks; Yangzhou, known for scholars and silk; and Suzhou, known for its beauties. Instead they prepare to walk northward into winter.

Travelers try to avoid this route, and for good reason. It's a punishing one, passing through impoverished areas that aren't used to distinguished visitors, up and down through the watersheds of three great rivers—the Yangtze, the Huai, and the Yellow—and through rural areas of five provinces. It's a postal relay route, designed for speedy communications rather than comfortable travel.

The people who will suffer most are the porters, who are already swarming over Nanchang's riverbank, stacking and packing and loading things onto their backs or into carts and wheelbarrows. A large crowd of people watch, but they're most curious about the ambassador and deputy ambassador who are sitting in a shabby building drinking tea and politely not eating a dish they find putrid, while officials instruct them about the journey.

They're told they must bring only what is absolutely necessary, and that the rest of their trunks will be sent to Beijing separately.

They are ready with an answer to this advice, because their servants have warned them that the real plan is to leave the belongings here until the party returns from Beijing. Titsingh says he wants nothing left behind except the very largest items and a few cases of wine. He feels that this will make his and his comrades' journey more pleasant, but it may be a miscalculation. To move him and the others and all their things a thousand miles through the freezing heart of northern China will be a huge logistical challenge. His insistence adds more complexity.



MAP 4 Dutch embassy's journey overland from Nanchang, Jiangxi, to Beijing. Source: Cox Cartographic, Ltd.

But his request is heeded. More porters are found. In total the expedition employs well more than a thousand, who carry almost everything, even Titsingh and Van Braam in their special palanquins. Some members of the party—including Guignes and the young gentlemen, such as Dozy, Agie, and the younger Van Braam—are given horses, which Guignes complains are “nags saddled with

wooden saddles and bridles made of rope.”¹

As the huge train—Guignes calls it a “lovely cavalcade”²—sets out through the curious crowds, soldiers fire salutes, and Guignes gets increasingly nervous. He’s written to his friend Agote that he’s not much of an equestrian: “You’ll laugh to see the figure I’ll make on horseback.”³ (When Agote copies this letter into his diary, he notes that he’d find it even funnier to see Van Braam on horseback, since the Dutchman “is himself as large as a horse.”⁴) To Guignes, the wooden saddle, the bit, and the bridle all seem clumsier than Western tack, and he’s afraid his horse will be scared by all the noise.⁵

But his mount does fine, and things go smoothly this first day. They reach the settlement of Lehua (樂化) just before nightfall. To be sure, the porters straggle in at different times, leading to “an inexpressible noise and confusion” as servants and stewards run around yelling, trying to locate things.⁶ Yet people calm down when dinner is served.

Unfortunately, today is an exception. They traveled only ten miles. To reach Beijing by the emperor’s deadline, they’ll need to travel an average of thirty miles per day for the next thirty days. At three miles per hour, the standard pace of a human walker, their porters will have to march at least ten hours per day, and that doesn’t count time to rest or eat. Moreover, they’ll be carrying heavy burdens, such as crates of South African wine and Van Braam.

The grueling schedule starts the next day, and the first thing the travelers notice is how early they have to get up. They’re on the road hours before dawn, under a cold bright moon. The second thing they notice is how dependent they are on the goodwill of the people and creatures who carry them.

For example, there’s the problem of horses. Guignes and the young gentlemen find it funny at first to watch as attendants try to load uncooperative horses onto a ferry across a river, but on the other side, the humor disappears, because it’s their turn to ride. Guignes’s horse has a limp, so he commandeers another from a Qing soldier. It trots gamely at first but then refuses to move.⁷ The other gentlemen’s horses are stubborn, too, and sometimes just lie down. Ultimately, he and his companions decide to walk, trying to enjoy the beautiful scenery. Members of Titsingh’s honor guard are also on foot, because the porters have set down their chairs and refuse to carry them any farther.

This goes on for forty miles, fifteen hours of travel. They don’t walk the whole way, but by the time they arrive in the famous old city of De’an, they’re exhausted and hungry, and here they learn here another aspect of land travel: The porters carrying cooking

implements and food are far behind, which means no good supper. To make matters worse, the lodgings are bad and lack any kind of kitchen.

Titsingh is furious. He complains to their chief escort, the man tasked with getting them to Beijing safely, Wang Shiji (王仕基), an official of considerable standing, who when not acting as the ambassador's chaperone heads a prefecture in Guangdong.⁸ For him, this is a unique opportunity, a chance for direct contact with the imperial court. Escorts are often rewarded with imperial honors or promotions. Titsingh and his companions don't know Wang Shiji well at this point and haven't yet come to hate him. Eventually they will. Guignes will call him "the stupidest, vainest, and most ignorant person I've ever seen in my life."⁹

Titsingh wants to know why his companions get the "dregs of the horses," while imperial officials and their servants get the good ones. Why were his guards and servants summarily set down on the road and forced to walk? Why did the cooks and their implements not arrive until nearly midnight? Why did trunks and beds arrive so late, and incompletely? Why are the lodgings so ill equipped? Why should the mandarins get the better house while the Dutch are forced to stay in this bad one?¹⁰

Wang explains that the situation should be blamed on the porters, who are lazy and disobedient. He promises to crack down. As for the poor accommodations, he says that only so much can be done. Lodging and provisions are the responsibility of local officials, and these regions aren't used to high-ranking visitors, who rarely pass this way. He says that housing may be poor for a few days but will improve as they approach Beijing. He asks Titsingh to please make do as best he can and continue the journey. Otherwise, they'll never arrive in Beijing in time.¹¹

But conditions don't improve. When they leave De'an, later in the morning than they'd hoped, it's raining. They'll have to cover thirty miles through mountainous terrain, a very difficult trek, and things start to go wrong from the beginning. Guignes and Dozy, for example, get a particularly late start, and as they rush through the cold drizzle to catch up with the others, they pass too close to a wheelbarrow driver, who turns in surprise and catches his armband on Guignes's stirrup. "I carried along the two Chinese and the wheelbarrow and turned over everything," Guignes writes. "I fell, too, but got up in the blink of an eye.... I was in a lot of pain but got back in the saddle again."¹²

The first half of the day is spent climbing a mountain, at the top of which stands a temple where Guanyin, the Buddhist Goddess of

Mercy, sits on a lotus bloom, thirty arms stretched out.¹³ Guignes and Agie dine in a room behind her, complaining about the clumsy wooden spoons.

Spoons turn out to be the least of their worries. One might think that the hard part is the ascent, but not in this case. When Guignes and Agie emerge from the temple, the rain and wind are stronger.¹⁴ It's one of the shortest days of the year, and darkness falls just as they reach the steep and slippery road down toward the city of Jiujiang (九江). Their torches keep blowing out, so they trot next to each other, their horses touching, following the road across streams and up and down hills. Sometimes the path narrows and follows mountainsides with steep drops, where they can hear water falling loudly into the inky depths. Sometimes they dismount and lead their horses. Other times they lose the trail and let the horses lead them. At one point, Guignes sees something white and dismounts to have a look. A bridge with no railings. He's terrified to think how easily he could have trotted off the edge. He and Dozy feel their way across.

They come to a guardhouse, where a kind watchman serves tea and appoints a guide to lead them farther under a bamboo torch. The guide throws down the torch and runs away. Guignes jumps down from his horse, grabs the torch, and gives it a shake to keep it from going out. By the feeble light they see they're alone in a dark field. They have no idea which way to go. A man comes along. Their Chinese is good enough to ask whether he's going toward town. He says yes, so they hand him the torch and ride behind, watching him carefully. The rain intensifies. The road is filled with holes. The horses stumble. As they climb a high bridge, Guignes's horse stumbles and nearly pitches him into the water.

Just as the torches are drenched by a downpour, they enter the outskirts of Jiujiang, following the voice of the kind stranger through dark suburbs to their lodging, where attendants run out with lanterns to greet them and take them to a warm fire. They're soaked and exhausted, but their hosts are kind and curious and make them laugh. Unfortunately, there's nothing to cook with, so there's no supper.¹⁵

At least Guignes and Dozy made it. Van Braam is left on the road. His porters, exhausted and numb with cold, set his palanquin beneath a shed and disappear into a house to warm themselves. "Thus abandoned," he writes, "I laid myself down to sleep in my vehicle, experiencing at that moment how fortunate it was that our merchant Ponqua had taken care to procure such convenient carriages for the Ambassador and me. The rest of the night passed away while I was enjoying a comfortable sleep."¹⁶

Titsingh has a worse experience. "The howl of the wind, the rush

of water falling here and there from the clifflike mountains, the continual rain, and the darkness of the night made me despondent.”¹⁷ The torches keep blowing out, and he and his porters can do nothing but wait until someone else in the train arrives. He doesn’t get to the lodging until two in the morning. He warms himself at the fire but barely touches his dinner. He falls asleep in his clothes.¹⁸

They’re supposed to move on quickly, crossing the Yangtze, but Titsingh refuses to get out of bed. Eventually he’s awakened by the sound of Van Braam’s voice and springs up to learn about Van Braam’s experience. Others arrive, one by one, complaining bitterly. A kindly old official gives them a fine meal, which was apparently originally intended for Wang Shiji and the other escorts, who are still missing. Titsingh doesn’t much care for Chinese food, but, he writes, “since we’d had nothing good in front of us for such a long time, we greatly prized this reception.”¹⁹

The old official urges him to get underway, but as Titsingh climbs into his palanquin, a translator tells him that the river will take a long time to cross and there won’t be a good place to stay on the other side. Since it’s already late, it’s better to stay here and get an early start tomorrow. So Titsingh orders his staff to prepare a good supper so that, after a nice meal, they’ll go to bed early.

While the cooks try to locate and unpack pots and pans, the gentlemen—except for Titsingh—take a stroll through Jiujiang. The town is ancient, occupying a strategic position at the intersection of huge Lake Poyang (鄱陽湖) and the Yangtze River. Its walls are vast, but the city itself is strangely empty. Houses and buildings are separated by wide fields, and Van Braam estimates that no more than a tenth of the area is built upon. Even so, he and his companions encounter dense crowds, and if not for the soldiers, they wouldn’t be able to go anywhere. One soldier has an unusual way of keeping the curious back, dipping his torch in mud and waving it about. The travelers enjoy looking at the women and girls who stare from doorways and windows. Guignes judges them prettier than others he’s seen to this point.²⁰ Van Braam writes that he “even remarked some who were beautiful.”²¹

When they return, Titsingh asks about the shops and is told that some sell fur coats. He wants someone to go out and buy some for him, to give to his guards and servants, but the old official suddenly begins urging him to leave at once, saying that the winds are favorable and might turn at any time. Titsingh eventually gives in. “Thus,” writes Guignes, “we had to leave our house, and with deep regret, because we left there our dinner.”²²

Late in the afternoon they arrive at the shore of the Yangtze,

where Returning Dragon Tower (回龍塔) stands to ward off floods.²³ Tall trees shelter a nearby temple. The scene is lovely, but most impressive of all is the river itself, which stretches out before them under overcast skies. It's almost a mile wide here. They can barely see the other side.

The boats are new, spacious, and comfortable, with large sitting rooms. As they lurch through the rough water, the travelers gaze at the other vessels, including huge, three-masted ships that move like ships at sea. The river sways and rocks like the ocean. Guignes and another comrade get seasick and are relieved when they finally disembark on a dark, flat, muddy bank.

Although the old official was eager to send them on their way, people on this side don't seem ready for them. Guignes's palanquin sits on the ground for hours while his porters look for lanterns. Finally, he gives the porters money from his dwindling purse so they can buy some, but by the time they pick him up again, it's after nine o'clock and freezing cold. This palanquin has no room to stretch out his legs, and the wind assaults his ears and eyes through holes in the sides. A deluge douses the torches. Local farmers refuse to open their doors when the porters ask for new torches. Guignes hears the sound of yelling and a door being smashed. His porters return with light.

It's after two in the morning when he finally reaches the "detestable hut" allocated for tonight's lodging. Some of the others are already sitting around a tiny fire, cursing the old official who made them leave Jiujiang and regretting the meal they had left behind. They've had nothing to eat since lunch.

Van Braam is particularly angry. Like Guignes, he was set down on the ground and forced to wait, but in his case, the porters demanded money. After two hours of dispute, the porters got what they wanted, but by then the wind and rain had gotten worse. After a long, miserable journey, he now finds himself with no food and no place to sleep. He's upset with Titsingh for agreeing to forsake a good dinner for this fiasco.²⁴

But where is Titsingh? He's having an even worse time. His porters also didn't receive torches, just flimsy paper lanterns that kept tearing in the wind. They keep having to stop to try to relight them, and he falls far behind, his bearers stumbling forward through wind and rain. Eventually, around eleven at night, they give up and set him down in the road. They go into a nearby watchhouse, leaving him alone in the darkness. For an hour he waits, and then he's told that the soldiers in the watchtower have a document ordering that he be kept here. "This gave me strange thoughts," he writes, "and many times I regretted having allowed myself to be convinced to go on this

embassy.”²⁵ Realizing that he’s completely at the mercy of his escorts, he lies down in his chair and tries to sleep. Around three o’clock, the porters pick him up again, but the wind drives them back inside. They reemerge and pick him up again at dawn, and in the light, he sees how steep and slippery the road is. This makes him grateful for the night’s delay. “At that point, the stay at the watchhouse seemed to me to be a sign of thoughtfulness.”²⁶

When he finally reaches the miserable hut, it’s eight o’clock in the morning, and his companions are discussing why the old official subjected them to such a long journey and lied about the distance. Guignes presents a theory, which he heard from one of the man’s staff members: that the old man was afraid he’d have to spend his own funds to buy the fur overcoats that Titsingh had wanted. Each official is supposed to pay the costs of the embassy while it’s in his territory, and a good host shouldn’t let a guest pay for anything.²⁷ Good fur is expensive. Titsingh has just enough time to swallow some boiled rice and a cup of water before they set out.²⁸

The following days are similarly grueling, but there are beautiful sights. The countryside becomes flatter, traversed by streams, and to the west rise the cloud-topped Dabie Mountains (大别山), which mark the eastern boundary of Anhui Province. These mountains are also a threshold between two ecological zones—the Yangtze watershed and the Huai River watershed—and ancient observers noted that the flora changes dramatically on the other side. Although this area isn’t far from the Yangtze as the crow flies, it’s poor and rural, a different world from the wealthy, commercial regions they’d be in by now if they’d stayed on boats. The mountains present striking views, such as a temple standing above two waterfalls, and as they walk through towns and villages, inhabitants come out of houses to watch, men in front and women behind, “the most beautiful of them hiding themselves the most.”²⁹ The road crosses streams and rivers on bridges of stone or bamboo. Where it’s less muddy, Guignes and his friends get out and walk, passing brick factories, pine forests, and herds of cows.³⁰

Nights are spent in postal stations, the lodgings “unimaginably bad.”³¹ Because cooking supplies lag behind or get ahead, meals are improvised. “We had neither forks nor spoons,” Van Braam records in his journal on one occasion,

because the former are not used by the Chinese, and the latter they make out of porcelain, with a wooden handle. We had to make use of them to eat the soup, and we had to drink water instead of wine. It would be a strange portrait indeed if our party were to be painted in this way, as we

so often find ourselves in this land journey. Surely no other embassy has experienced adventures such as these.³²

By the middle of December, they're in Anhui Province, one of the most rural of eastern China. People here rarely have a chance to see foreigners, and as the travelers approach the walls of Taihu County, a crowd rushes forward. Intimidated, the travelers climb into their palanquins for refuge, but the locals block their way and push and tear at the vehicles' fabric. The porters leave the road and run out over a sandy wash, but the people follow. "It was amusing," Guignes writes, "to see how eager were these Chinese, who were so transported by their curiosity that they yelled, tumbled onto the sand, and pushed each other over." The porters manage to evade their pursuers, running past the town with its grand tower. "I've rarely seen them go so fast," Guignes writes.³³

The Europeans are getting the hang of this overland travel. At the request of escorts, Titsingh has agreed to allow many items to be taken separately to Beijing. He and the others marked the baggage they wanted to stay with them, although they had to shoo the porters out, because the latter kept trying to take the lightest items.³⁴ This division of the baggage seems to have improved their progress, and the land get increasingly lovely, as they trek through cold rain up hills and through pine forests, the Dabie Mountains to the left, fertile valleys to the right. "The whole," observes Van Braam, "composes a very beautiful picture, with a long succession of mountains in the distance, where the eye of the spectator discerns pagodas and other edifices standing upon elevated spaces, and surrounded by innumerable trees."³⁵

He admires the Chinese farmers who have converted the foothills into farmland by building terraces with retaining walls and drainage systems, placing reservoirs at the top, so that in times of drought, "the reviving stream descends, and saves the corn, grass, and vegetables from its pernicious effects."³⁶ It's winter now, so the terraces are bare, but he imagines the view in the summer, "when wheat embellishes the surface, and covers it with a verdant carpet."³⁷ He feels that his countrymen have much to appreciate here: "The eye of any European is delighted at beholding the industrious application of the Chinese, who, rating difficulties at nothing, convert mountains into fertile fields, and change their inclined surface into level ground."³⁸

Sometimes there are kindnesses. In Tongcheng County (桐城), the travelers are given tea and sugar, a hundred hams, and a hundred salted ducks on behalf of the provincial governor of Anhui, who

sends regrets that he can't visit them in person because of the heavy rain.³⁹ Their stay is comfortable—the best they've had since the land journey started.

But there are also miserable days. The day after the hundred hams is the worst yet. They must go from Tongcheng to Shucheng (舒城), a distance of nearly forty miles up and then down a steep mountain road. By dawn, Van Braam has already been in the rain for hours, but now his palanquin is just sitting in the mud. He was allocated twelve porters, who are supposed to take turns resting and carrying, but seven have run away, and the other five can't carry him on their own. He blames these "scoundrels" for absconding, but who can blame them? He's heavy, and conditions are miserable: below freezing, with a sharp northern wind. Even worse, last night's rain made the roads slippery, and the porters' straw sandals offer scant protection from the cold mud. They sink up to their calves with each step. Eventually more men are provided, but precious time has been lost.⁴⁰

It's a bad start to a bad day, which will last more than twenty hours. But as Van Braam's palanquin begins climbing toward the Dabie pass, the colder conditions improve the road. Frozen mud is easier to navigate than liquid mud. At Daguan Town (大關), which guards the entrance to a pass over the mountains, they obtain new porters, and Van Braam gets a soldier to ride next to him to ensure that his don't run away.⁴¹

The mountain scenery is breathtaking. The trees are encased in ice and snow, which the Chinese from Canton have never seen. "The light reflected from these little globes of crystal," Van Braam writes, "produced an effect which created at once astonishment and pleasure, and which was such as I never remember to have seen at any other period of my life."⁴² Near the summit, they rest in a village of stone houses whose roofs are decked with icicles. They're offered a meal of mutton prepared in the Chinese style. Titsingh is surprised to find, thanks to his hunger, that some of the dishes are good.⁴³

From the summit they have a clear view of a wide canyon descending between two mountains, a scene that Van Braam finds "so attractive that I could not satisfy my eyes.... Yes, I am sure that many people in Europe would go a hundred miles to enjoy a prospect so enchanting as that of this valley."⁴⁴

The steep descent crosses dozens of streams that rush out from little canyons, and it's getting dark by the time they reach the bottom of the pass. If they were to stop here, at Meixin Station (梅心驛), it would be a good long day of travel—twenty-eight miles and more than twelve hours.

But they still have ten miles to go, and the wind suddenly turns so piercing that it feels as though they've been transported into the depths of winter. The cold doesn't even freeze the ground all the way through, so the porters are often wading through mud up to their knees, slipping and stumbling, and the road is narrow, with trenches on both sides. Four times Van Braam is dropped, and the seat of his palanquin is shattered. Titsingh doubles his porters' daily tip and lets them take numerous breaks, but even so, he writes, "we foundered terribly. The people were deadly tired."⁴⁵ Deadly, but not dead, which can't be said for the horses they pass on the side of the road.

At the Hangbu River (杭埠河), several miles short of their lodging in Shucheng, there are only two rafts to move everything across.⁴⁶ Boxes and bundles clutter the banks, as porters, soldiers, and horses press forward. When Guignes's boards, he's scared that one of the precarious stacks of boxes and trunks will be tipped over by the rocking of the raft. The horses are already nervous, and if one were to rear up, it would overturn the raft and throw everyone into the freezing water.⁴⁷ He's relieved when the raft reaches the other side. His porters stumble forward in the weak torchlight, stopping frequently to rest.

Titsingh is one of the first to reach Shucheng, brought to a "miserable hut" that's "more like a stable for cows than a place for people."⁴⁸ It's dark and dank, with no fire for tea, no separate rooms, and no beds—just bamboo platforms where the travelers are expected to lie down together without their bedding. The city magistrate apologizes, saying there's nothing better, so Titsingh says he'll just go sleep in the street and calls for his palanquin, sending the magistrate away.⁴⁹ Another official tries reasoning with him but gets the same treatment. Servants manage to locate a fire-pot to warm some water, but the coal is wet and fills the hut with smoke. At this point, messengers arrive to say that a better lodging has been found. So around midnight, Titsingh is carried through the city gates to a building with proper rooms and stoves for tea. Unfortunately, there's nothing to eat.

Van Braam doesn't arrive until two o'clock in the morning, more than twenty hours after the day's journey started. He takes a seat around the little fire, where he and the others complain. By the time he and Titsingh go to sleep in their clothes in their palanquins, many of their comrades still haven't arrived.⁵⁰

The next morning, some are still missing. Titsingh's Malay servants eventually show up, as does his steward, who has lost his shoes. The man says he and his companions were set down by their porters and had to spend the entire night on the road, forbidden to

seek shelter in any village. His shoes got stuck in the mud, and he walked the last eight miles in his socks.⁵¹

He's not the worst off: Six porters have died, and others are still out there, some lying helpless on the road. Guignes is disgusted: "It's beyond the pale that one makes these men do routes this exhausting. People show not the slightest pity toward them." He feels that imperial officials are to blame: "They conduct us like cattle, thinking perhaps that we resemble them."⁵²

Officials claim that they've already complained to Beijing and that the city magistrate is to blame, saying he'll probably lose his post because of the mistake with the lodgings. But Titsingh suspects that the whole affair is an act of premeditated collusion. He's heard that the magistrate has been in financial distress and even talked about hanging himself, afraid of the great expense of the embassy. Titsingh suspects that he made a deal with the expedition's escorts, offering presents in exchange for conducting the travelers to the hut, but the scheme fell apart when Titsingh became dissatisfied.⁵³

They spend two days in Shucheng, much to the frustration of their escorts. This delay worries local officials. Chen Yongfu (陳用敷), who has been serving as governor of Anhui Province, writes a memo to the emperor to explain. He says rain and snow have muddled the roads, and the heavy presents are too clumsy to carry. Moreover, the Westerners wear thin clothing, unsuited to winter. He writes that he's taken care to ensure that such delays don't recur. For one thing, he's sending "the clumsy and heavy" items ahead separately.⁵⁴ For another, he's delegated officials to handle logistics better.

One of those officials is named Diao Zhicheng (刁至城), and he pays a visit to the travelers when they stop at Dianbu Township (店埠), where he's housed them in a pretty little residence.⁵⁵ He says he feels bad that they must travel in the cold and difficult season and that he wishes he could do more to make their journey pleasant.⁵⁶ He apologizes for the treatment they received in Shucheng and says that the magistrate of that city has been demoted for the affair with the bad hut. He offers them twenty-seven sheepskin robes for the cold. Titsingh accepts, "because refusing would lead to shame, according to Chinese custom."⁵⁷ Van Braam converts two robes into sacks for him and Titsingh, to keep their legs warm while riding in the palanquins, heated by hot water jugs. The rest are distributed to the soldiers and servants.⁵⁸ Chen Yongfu notes in his report to the emperor that the Westerners, upon receiving these gifts, "unanimously rejoiced, clasping hands, to express their thanks."⁵⁹ This is a nice turn of phrase, if not exactly true, but what is true is that even Guignes is impressed by Diao's kindness, which in some

way makes up for the indignities they suffer when he leaves: a sober meal without wine, despite the ambassador's repeated entreaties to make sure that two crates of alcohol stay with the cooking items; and the lack of bedding, which forces them to sleep in palanquins again.⁶⁰

Onward they hurry. On the day before Christmas, they're awakened before three o'clock in the morning. They tramp in the darkness through poor villages—clay houses decked with straw—and flat farmland stretching toward distant mountains. Dozy puts his skates on and goes out on a frozen pond. He tried this a few days previously, to ill effect. The ice cracked, and he fell through. Most shocking, the Chinese nearby just stood and watched as he pulled himself out. Today the ice holds, so the younger Van Braam joins in, wearing skates furnished by Mr. Browne, chief of the English, who found them among supplies left by Lord Macartney. (His lordship never had an opportunity to use them, because his voyage was in the summer.) Onlookers gather and stare, open mouthed.⁶¹

There's no wine and no dinner for Christmas eve, which they spend in the township of Zhangqiao (張橋). They even lack underwear to change into and bedding to sleep on. Yet the officials escorting them seem to suffer no such privation. "We plainly saw," Van Braam notes, "that the hardships we suffered proceeded from a want of order, and from the inattention of the different Mandarins of the provinces. An incontrovertible proof of this fact is that the Mandarins, our conductors, who depended solely upon themselves, were in want of nothing."⁶²

The travelers wake up at four o'clock on Christmas morning, stiff with cold, and find the thermometer at twenty-one degrees Fahrenheit, the coldest temperature so far. Titsingh is used to the tropics and despite the sheepskin and hot water, his palanquin is numbingly cold, so he gets out and walks to warm up. After lunch, the porters stop, because no one has paid them.

At Dingyuan (定遠), Van Braam urges Titsingh to refuse to go any farther today because they've already been so delayed that they won't reach their original destination until late at night, which would mean either going to bed without supper or going to sleep very late, which is unhealthy, because they must get up so early each day. Wouldn't it be better, Van Braam asks, to have a decent meal and a good night's sleep?⁶³ It is Christmas, after all.

Titsingh agrees, but Director Diao and other officials urge him to go just another ten miles (thirty li). Titsingh and Van Braam say no: The officials are always downplaying the distances to be traveled, and anyway, it's their own fault that there are so many delays. "If better care were regularly taken to have the bearers ready, the

journey would proceed much more smoothly, but instead every morning we've had to wait a couple of hours, not to mention the fact that there is a wait for new bearers every afternoon. In this way we lose the best three hours of the day."⁶⁴ As for arriving late, of course it's not a big deal to skip a dinner once in a while, but it certainly shouldn't happen daily. And what about the luggage? Many people in the party haven't seen their trunks for days and are desperate for fresh underwear and other necessities. Last but certainly not least, the entire party hasn't tasted a single drop of wine in six days. The ambassador and his people can't continue subjecting themselves to such privation.⁶⁵

For an hour Diao and the other officials reason with Titsingh, saying that the emperor has repeatedly emphasized his desire to see them before New Year's. The ambassador offers to leave at three the next morning so they can make it to Linhuai (臨淮). They counter by asking him to leave at two in the morning instead. Van Braam says it's a trick: they're trying to tack on an extra twenty or thirty li beyond Linhuai. So Titsingh says his mind is made up: they'll go no farther than Linhuai. "Perceiving," Van Braam writes triumphantly, "that our opposition was systematic, and founded upon a geographical knowledge of the country, they changed their tone, and at last told us that it wouldn't be necessary to break our rest, and that a servant of our Mandarins would call us in the morning when it should be time to set off."⁶⁶ Old Diao Zhicheng doesn't disguise his disappointment. He blames Van Braam for the setback.⁶⁷

So the travelers spend the rest of Christmas Day relaxing. Dozy and the younger Van Braam go out to a pond near the city and skate again, watched by hundreds, who seem "amazed to no end."⁶⁸ Ice skating is a beloved pastime of the Manchus in Beijing, but not here, it seems.

Christmas ends with a good dinner and an early bedtime. Titsingh and Van Braam even have bedding, but not Guignes or the others:

We were obliged to sleep on boards, or on these types of beds made out of interlaced cords, on which we put some straw. To this disagreeable thing, it was necessary to add the fact of not having anything to change into, and nothing to drink except water.... This is the manner [in] which the Chinese treat strangers who are good enough to visit them. Truly, one must be firm with them and never cede anything when one has a right to demand it.⁶⁹

The road north of Dingyuan passes under cold, cloudy skies through barren and rocky country. "Up to this point," writes Van

Braam, “we have seen nothing so bare and wretched.”⁷⁰ Suddenly, in the early afternoon, the travelers find themselves looking down on a fertile plain. They had barely realized they were climbing, but now they’re looking down into the Huai River valley.

It’s dazzling, perhaps because the sun has come out and illuminates the streams and villages, the roofs and trees covered with snow. This view, writes Van Braam, is

rendered still more beautiful by the most striking contrast that nature ever created in so small a space. I had just passed through a desert and sandy country, and now a cultivated plain of vast extent captivated my eyes. This immense landscape, of which the horizon was the only boundary, was still farther embellished by villages and hamlets scattered in every direction.⁷¹

It reminds him of the famous view from King’s Table, in his home province of Utrecht.

A steep descent brings them down into the fields, where they follow a wide road bordered by willows. Up close, the peasants’ houses are “miserable and measly,” and the terrain is drier than it had seemed from above, although there are many ponds, which the locals use to conserve water for the crops.⁷² The sun has melted the ice on the road. It’s muddy and slippery, filled with ruts from carts. They make slow progress, passed by donkeys and packhorses.

It’s nearly dark as they approach Linhuai Township along a high causeway with water on either side. The city occupies a strategic position on the great Huai River, from which it gets its name, but the richer parts of the river valley are downstream. From what they can see in the dark, the travelers judge Linhuai to be poor, although they admit that this may be simply because their lodging is so bad.⁷³ Once again, they go to bed without supper, because the cooks arrive so late.

The following morning, they get up well before dawn and cross the Huai River on a bridge made of fifty rafts. The country is flat as far as the eye can see, which causes problems for the locals: The Huai River is prone to flood. But it’s winter, dry season, and the wide road is nice and dry, crowded with mules and donkeys. The weather is lovely—clear and not as cold.

The fields are bare now, but in spring they’ll be filled with barley, rapeseed, cabbage—it’s fertile land. From horseback one can see a long distance, and Guignes notes flocks of geese and herds of small goats and sheep. His horse has a mouth “as hard as a martyr’s head,” and as they approach the Xie River (濉河), it refuses to step around

some stones, causing Guignes to tumble to the ground, which brings down his mounted companions as well.⁷⁴ They laugh and climb back in their saddles, crossing the river on a crumbling stone bridge of impressive length. Guignes estimates its length at more than a half mile, which is odd, because the river itself isn't very wide.⁷⁵ The river runs wider in the rainy season. The discrepancy shows how much the wet season differs from the dry.

Guignes isn't always provided with a horse, so he sometimes takes matters into his own hands. One morning, for instance, he and Dozy sneak over to the house where one of their escorts is staying, walk into the courtyard, and detach two of his horses. Servants yell, trying to frighten the horses, who refuse to move, despite the blows that the two men liberally apply. The escort himself suddenly arrives at the gate, and when his servants rush out to complain to him, Dozy and Guignes make their escape. The escort tells his people to let them go.⁷⁶

For a time, the countryside remains beautiful, the roadway lined by trees and bordered by a frozen ditch, reminding Titsingh of the polderlands of Holland.⁷⁷ In Holland, however, people wouldn't be allowed to build stores right in the middle of the road, taking up half its width. At one place, Guignes nearly trips on the rim of a well dug in the center of the road. "One could easily fall into it," he writes, "and the horses could break their legs."⁷⁸ The bridges are no better—they lack any kind of railing at all.

The land becomes more barren as they move northward, the settlements increasingly destitute. In the city of Suzhou (宿州), they're shown to a lodging that Guignes and Dozy complain is fit only for pigs. When they say this to the caretaker, he gets red with anger. But, perhaps recalling what happened to officials in Shucheng, local administrators say that this house is actually only intended for the embassy's luggage. Guignes scoffs. There are covered chairs, so clearly it was intended as a place to stay. One of their escorts arrives and takes their side, saying that some deception is going on. They climb back on their horses and are led past a ruined tower and through a town gate. Suzhou seems poor, with "disagreeable" streets and empty lots, but the building they're brought to is grand.⁷⁹ Guignes suspects that their chief escort, Wang Shiji, intended it for himself.

Past Suzhou, the road leads through flat farmlands toward mountains, and soon they have crossed into Jiangsu Province. They will only pass through a small part of the province, much to the relief of local officials.

The land becomes dry and barren, empty except for some pine

trees. They skirt mountains and then climb a gorge. The wind is bitter, and the road worsens, the horses stumbling on the uneven paving stones. At the top, they see a lovely valley laid out below, filled with tombs shaded by cypress trees and adorned with monuments and ceremonial gateways. A flat-topped mountain rises on the other side. "This variety," writes Van Braam, "by occupying the eye, almost banishes from the mind every idea of the mournful destination of the place."⁸⁰ They walk through the valley and then follow a rugged path up the other side. A large, square fortress watches from the peak.

When they reach the summit, they're rewarded with an even more stunning view: an extensive valley, through which, Van Braam writes, "meanders ... a noble river, which seems to take pleasure in winding through it, while its banks, embellished by houses or boats, give new charms to this enchanting spot."⁸¹

The river is the Yellow River, China's pride and China's sorrow, source not just of the fertile soils that wash through the North China Plain but also of deadly floods. It has a tendency to flip its banks and change its course. In the past, it ran far to the north. In the future, it will carve a new path again, with devastating consequences. The walled city looking over it is Xuzhou (徐州), one of China's most storied. By an earlier name, it appears frequently in ancient annals, fought over by clever kings and cruel warlords. Now it's a major hub for communications and transport, home to a major customs office.

From their vantage, they can see its stout walls and huge gatehouses. In front, closer to them, Cloud Dragon Mountain (雲龍山) rises above seven-story Kui Mountain Tower (奎山塔).⁸² Just below them lie an infinitude of tombs with pyramids, towers, and huge urns. Their appearance, "far from offering an unpleasant impression and bringing to mind disagreeable things, actually, thanks to the unique and singular forms, flatter infinitely the view."⁸³ Beyond Xuzhou, past the Yellow River, they see Weishan Lake (微山湖), its wooded islands dotted with villages. Guignes longs to make a proper drawing, but his art supplies are in his baggage, and he has only a small notebook and pen. Anyway, they're in a hurry. Soon they're being hustled past ceremonial gates and well-built houses down a steep incline to the huge walls of Xuzhou.

They pass through the city's southern gate, crowned by the largest and most beautiful gatehouse they've ever seen, and find themselves in a busy street. People come out of doorways to watch, standing silently. "Not one of them," Guignes observes, "permitted himself to laugh—which had happened very often in other places—despite the fact that our strange clothing must have surprised them a great deal

because they had never had a European pass near them.”⁸⁴ Their houses’ curved roofs are adorned with carvings and little stone statues, and their shops are clean and prosperous. “One wouldn’t say,” writes Guignes, “that they are exactly rich, but one can find here anything one might need. Up to this point, we’ve seen nothing so nice and that has pleased us as much.”⁸⁵ Van Braam is excited by the millet for sale. This grain, cultivated in the Netherlands, isn’t grown in southern China. He buys some and has it for lunch, served with milk and sugar, on the other side of the city in a huge and beautiful public hall.

After dining, they head through the suburbs and emerge to see the Yellow River flowing fast and dirty below them. It’s wide—perhaps half a mile from side to side—and there are no bridges. A steep ramp leads down to a pier. Crowds gather, trying to catch a glimpse of the ambassador in his palanquin. The “detestable” horses are frightened of the ferry boats, and the attendants have a hard time getting them to embark.⁸⁶ Maybe the horses are right to be nervous. The current churns with chunks of ice. The crossing is long and frightening, because the sailors must weave the boats back and forth to avoid the debris. It’s a relief to reach the other side.⁸⁷

They are now in the North China Plain, cradle of Chinese civilization, a vast expanse of rich, alluvial soils that produce wheat, millet, sorghum, and cotton, sustaining a dense population. Most of the plain doesn’t rise more than fifty yards above sea level. There won’t be any more mountain passes, so they’re told that they no longer need to contend with horses. They’ll be given comfortable carriages.

When they see the “carriages,” however, they’re surprised. The vehicles are like farm-carts, the sort that a European peasant would use to haul onions to market: small, with solid wooden wheels and simple thick dowels for axles. Each one has a roof made of mats but is open in the front. They don’t even have benches—just straw spread at the bottom. In Europe, carriages have comfortable seats, glass windows, and springs to act as shock absorbers. Guignes and his companions tell the officials that there must be some mistake. How could wagons like this be intended for use by foreign visitors? The officials get angry and insist that high officials in China use vehicles like this for transport all the time. Offensive words are exchanged. Guignes and his companions are tempted to take justice into their own hands but decide to get back on their miserable horses.⁸⁸ They feel that the officials, in supplying these carts, have insulted their dignity. Later they’ll realize that high officials actually do use carts like these.⁸⁹

The terrain is flatter here, but travel presents its own challenges—and its own sights. Sailwagons, for example. They first spot them on the eastern side of Tong Mountain (銅山), when rounding Weishan Lake: whole fleets clattering along stone roadways. They’ve been noted in Western accounts of China for centuries and are particularly famous in the Netherlands, where they inspired Dutch engineer Simon Stevin to build his own version.⁹⁰ The Prince of Orange himself would take visiting dignitaries and ambassadors for rides along the beach, “flying over ditches and dikes.”⁹¹ They inspired engravings and literature, including a collection of poems by one of the great men of letters of the Dutch Golden Age, Hugo Grotius, who wrote:

Wind drives it forward, speeding far
Past the waves along the ground
Oh if you gave me such a car
I’d sail it all the world around.⁹²

The current Prince of Orange still has one in his collection, but not for long. In a couple weeks, he’ll be fleeing the French in a fishing boat. The sailwagon will be sold at auction, along with many other items in his collection.⁹³

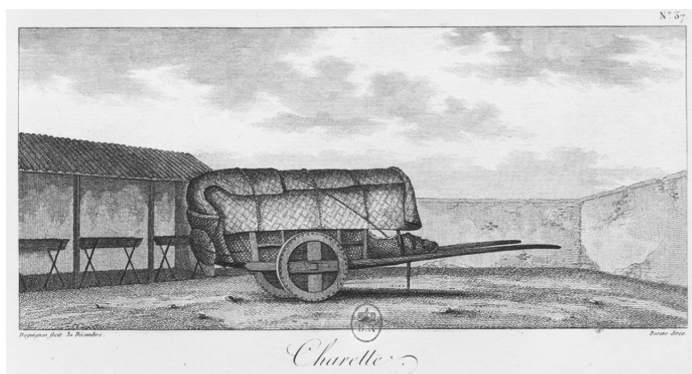


FIGURE 8. Cart. “Charette.” This engraving, probably from an original sketch by Guignes, depicts one of the carts he so hated riding in.

Source: From Chrétien-Louis-Joseph de Guignes, *Voyage à Péking, Manille et l’île de France: faits dans l’intervalle des années 1784 à 1801*, Vol. 4 (Atlas) (Paris: Treuttel & Würtz, 1808), plate 37. Public domain.

Van Braam marvels at the vehicles: the removable mast in the front, the sail three feet wide and five feet tall, the rigging to raise,

orient, and trim the sails, just like that of a Chinese junk. “I felt real pleasure,” he writes, “in seeing a score of these sailing barrows rolling along one after another.”⁹⁴ Guignes thinks they’re ridiculous: “The sails may be useful with a strong rear wind in flat country, but the variation of the wind occasioned by the turns in the river renders these wheelbarrows very difficult to keep balanced.” He concludes “that the Chinese do not have a strong acquaintance with mechanics.”⁹⁵

They also soon see the Grand Canal, a marvel of hydrological engineering, which links northern China to the Yangtze Delta, crossing both the Yellow River and the Yangtze thanks to a complex system of locks and dike works. When they reach it, at the canal lock of Hanzhuangjia (韓莊閘), Titsingh thinks it’s just a small river, although Guignes recognizes it. If they’d gone by water, they’d be floating along it by now, comfortably ensconced in official boats. Instead they cross it on a bridge of rafts, bumping along in saddles and palanquins, hurried ever onward, because the officials are getting worried about timing.

They’ve now crossed into Shandong Province, but Beijing is still 400 miles away, and the emperor is getting impatient. The Shandong governor, Pi Yuan (畢沅), reports that he’s doing his utmost to speed the ambassador along so he’ll exit the province within five or six days, but the Grand Council isn’t satisfied. In an urgent reply, they order Pi Yuan and other officials to ensure that the party reaches the capital by the Closing of the Seals, when the year’s business is ended for the New Year’s Ceremonies, which means before noon on January 11 (QL59 12月20日). There should be “no further delay.”⁹⁶ Yet the Grand Council also says that the ambassador and his suite must not suffer stress or fatigue from the journey, because the emperor has an obligation to treat men from afar with kindness.

These are mixed messages. How to balance the ambassador’s comfort against the need for speed? The Grand Council reveals its priorities by closing the instructions with the following words: “Let there not be the slightest delay, which would result in punishment.”⁹⁷ Pi Yuan won’t receive this reply until the Dutch have left his territory, but he and all the other officials know that they must hurry.

It’s the last day of 1794, meaning that the escorts have just ten and a half days to move the ambassador the rest of the way. That’s forty miles per day. There are no New Year’s Eve celebrations for Titsingh and the others: “After a sober meal without wine or beer, we went to bed early, unhappy that we had to end this year in such a miserable way.”⁹⁸

The new year starts fiercely cold, the wind bitter. It also starts

early. They're up by two in the morning, marching in the darkness. Guignes has to hold his reins in one hand and a torch in the other, but it keeps going out, so he gives up and goes slowly, step by step, until the sun reveals the flat wheat and millet fields. People in palanquins can at least sleep. At one point, Guignes and his companions trot past the palanquin of one of their escorts, who is snoring loudly, and turn back for a better look. "His chair was open," Guignes writes in his diary, "and we examined him at our ease, laughing loudly. He didn't wake up at all."⁹⁹

He's forced to wake up soon, however, because when the party gets to the outskirts of Tengzhou (滕州), they find a crowd gathered around an angry Van Braam. The snorer steps out of his palanquin, blinking and disoriented, and listens as the Dutchman describes how his bearers dropped him and ran away, leaving him at the mercy of this crowd, which is trying to steal his hat. People are laughing at the Europeans, touching them, and Guignes catches one trying to pick his pocket. More porters are found, but as they lift the gentlemen and start walking, the crowd pursues, yelling. Guignes's spooks when it sees a broken stone tortoise lying in a ditch, but he gets it under control and makes his escape.

Unfortunately, Van Braam's new porters are no good. They drop his palanquin again and again, until it breaks. He has to walk to the next station, Beijiehe (北界河), where he finds the ambassador and others. He refuses to go any farther until the chair is fixed. The others leave without him. Eventually a local official offers his own carriage. Van Braam demurs for a time but finally gives in. Guignes describes Van Braam's pathetic arrival many hours later in Zoucheng City (邹城), long after dark. "We finally saw Mr Van Braam show up in a little cart, making loud cries, groaning that he had been battered to bits and declaring that he would never again get into the damned cart that had brought him."¹⁰⁰ During a meager supper, he tells his companions about his bad day and his mistake in accepting the cart ride, and how, for the next five hours, he was painfully jolted and bounced around. "Such a carriage," he notes, "may possibly be convenient to a Chinese, but to a European it must ever be a real punishment."¹⁰¹ And now his bedding is nowhere to be found. There's just one single hard wooden platform for all the gentlemen to share, with no mattresses, cushions, or blankets. All they have to protect themselves from the cold wind that comes in through the doors of the huge bedroom are their cloaks and jackets.¹⁰² "I desired a soft bed more ardently than I had ever done before," Van Braam writes, "because I had not ceased to be jolted and shaken for four hours and a half in that horrible cart and was in pain from head to foot."¹⁰³

Shandong is an ancient province, but the travelers are in too much of a hurry to see the sights. Van Braam is particularly sad not to be able to explore Yanzhou, birthplace of Confucius, the sage who inspired Benjamin Franklin, Voltaire, and other great minds of Europe. In the bad palanquin that has been loaned to him, Van Braam is carried right past the city walls, glimpsing only a lofty tower. It seems a sad and impoverished place, and the other towns and villages they pass through are similarly wretched. As Titsingh writes of Dongping (東平), which they pass the following day, “If you have any desire to be in a miserable town, one could scarcely imagine anything more poor than this one.”¹⁰⁴ In the environs of Encheng (恩城), south of Dezhou (德州), he observes the poor clay houses thatched with straw and writes, “the poverty of the cities, towns, and villages, is beyond all imagination.”¹⁰⁵

More unsettling, the inhabitants of Shandong seem hostile. When the porters stop to eat at the roadside hostels, setting the palanquins down in the road, mobs of people appear, tearing curtains and jeering. Titsingh complains, but it’s not until he threatens to withhold the daily tip that his porters begin taking him inside the hostels. Guignes doesn’t have the financial resources for this, (he, too, has begun traveling by palanquin, because he’s too ill and tired to ride), so he’s at the mercy of his porters. In Encheng, for instance, a new team of porters simply sets him down and runs away into the cold sunny morning. New porters are hired, but most of them run away, too. Guignes talks to one of those who remain and learns that officials have requisitioned eight porters but are only paying enough for four, trying to force them to march by means of violence. The man says that once he was beaten so badly that he fell and injured his face. Guignes believes that the officials are trying to cheat the porters, so he demands that the men be paid in his presence, but this doesn’t help. As soon as the official is out of earshot, the porters abscond with the money, under the pretext of getting something to eat.¹⁰⁶

Even more frustrating is that Dezhou City, where they arrive later that same day, is famous for its horses. Guignes watches longingly as the other young gentlemen receive good, strong mounts—the best he’s seen to this point. “I really wanted to ride a horse,” he writes, “but, not being fully recovered and not having my saddle, I stayed in the chair.” While the other gentlemen trot off, he sits and waits, but the porters are reluctant to work, because the pay is so bad. When, finally, he gets underway, the people of the town pursue him. “Never,” he writes, “had I seen any more insolent. They insulted us, nearly destroyed my chair, and threw me to the ground. My porters

allowed them to do this, stopping on purpose.”¹⁰⁷

They make rapid progress through Shandong, and by January 5, they’ve entered Beizhili (北直隸), home province of Beijing.¹⁰⁸ The people here are just as frightening. In Fucheng (阜城), Titsingh’s porters set him down in the middle of a yelling mob and run away. Titsingh escapes on foot with one of the translators and seeks help from the mission’s escorts. The latter get so angry at the city magistrate that they punch him. Titsingh leaves the area under armed guard.¹⁰⁹

The accommodations are terrible, the food the worst they’ve had all journey. In Xian County (獻縣), the supper is so bad that one of the escorts dumps the dishes on the inkeeper’s head.¹¹⁰ The city is tremendously poor, and its dry, sandy territory is littered with broken houses. Others they pass are just as bad. Hejian (河間), writes Van Braam, is “rather a heap of ruins than an inhabited place.”¹¹¹ In the neglected temples, “the gods have been knocked over and exposed to the injuries of time.”¹¹²

Guignes has become so worried about porters abandoning him—especially at night—that he asks to stop traveling by palanquin. At first they say no, because, he writes, “the Chinese preferred to carry me rather than to carry others, since I am thin and light.” But eventually he’s offered a cart. The other gentlemen are also increasingly taking to carts. As Guignes writes: “Our gentlemen, seeing that they were making us travel by forced march, resolved to give up their horses, all the more so since one didn’t ever know where one would stop, and they never wanted to allow us to change our horses, and so these animals were always on the point of exhaustion.”¹¹³ They have to ride two to a cart, squeezed next to each other, their legs sticking out into the subfreezing winds. “The jolts often threw us one against the other, and we had a lot of trouble trying to avoid whiplash, despite all of our fur capes.”¹¹⁴

To make matters worse, the carts let in the notorious dust of the North China Plain. In the dry season—and winters are usually quite dry—the fine soil is easily disturbed by feet, wheels, and hooves. The dust pervades the mats that cover them. Sometimes, when the wind is against them, they feel like they’re suffocating.

And there’s little rest at night. They often start out at two in the morning and travel well past sunset. The night of January 7, for instance, they start at two in the morning and don’t reach their destination (Xiong County 雄縣) until 1:30 the following morning, almost twenty-four hours of travel, a distance of sixty miles (185 li).¹¹⁵ In a miserable hut, Titsingh and the others go to bed without dinner, although “bed” is an exaggeration. The ambassador lies

awake on his palanquin cushions “ruing with all my heart my thoughtlessness in having accepted this embassy.”¹¹⁶

Rarely do the travelers have actual beds. Almost nightly they, in the words of Titsingh, “had recourse to the cushions of our sedan chair, while the rest of our group was happy to find good hay.”¹¹⁷ Sometimes their departure is delayed, meaning even longer days. Sometimes Guignes and the younger gentlemen resort to extreme measures to avoid delays. For example, one morning, when no one has provided any transportation, they grab the house guardian and steal his hat and some other things, promising to return the items once carts have arrived. The man protests at first, but they make threats and begin to do some damage. He gives in and manages to get carts.

Often there’s little time to dine, and when there is, meals are, as Guignes writes, “a bit frugal for people to whom the heavy movements of the carts led to a prompt digestion.”¹¹⁸ Usually they get little more than plain rice, poached eggs, or half-cooked millet porridge. They’re often hungry, and people start to get sick. Guignes is feverish in his cart, suffocating from heat, and feeling pressure all over his body.

It’s not all grim. They can watch the sleigh traffic on Baigou River, or the dromedaries loping in lines along the roadways, sometimes carrying loads of sheep tied to their backs.¹¹⁹ In Xincheng Township (新城), a friendly staff feeds them apples and grapes. Yet as they get closer to Beijing, the poverty and misery of the inhabitants seems to increase. “One might have expected,” Titsingh writes, “to see, so close to the famous capital, a few traces of its luster, but everything painted a portrait of poverty.”¹²⁰ The road becomes terrible, filled with holes caused by water erosion, so the procession sometimes veers through local fields. Guignes is surprised at how little regard they have for the farmers’ livelihoods:

I was very surprised to find in a country where agriculture is so valued, and above all so cared for, that the travelers had such disregard for the cultivated fields. When the road is in bad shape, or when it makes a considerable bend, the carts, the horses, and the people on foot pass through the planted fields in order to shorten the route or to make a new one for themselves, not worrying themselves whether the grain had sprouted or was already tall.¹²¹

Westerners have written so much about how China’s rulers revere and foster agriculture that he finds it difficult to square his experience with received knowledge.

Their only consolation among all these “miseries and exhaustions” is that the journey is drawing to a close, and it looks as though they’ll make it to Beijing on time.¹²²

On the ninth of January, the day they’ll finally see Beijing, they’re up at two in the morning. Guignes hasn’t slept at all, but Titsingh’s spirits are high: “Since today our hateful land journey comes to an end, we got underway with fresh morale at three in the morning.” Fevered Guignes takes off his clothes and gradually starts to feel better, but the landscape is like ash, and the villages and guardhouses are dreary and poor. Even county seats such as Liangxiang (良鄉) “present an appearance of dolor and destitution.” People walk along the roads scooping droppings of man and beast into baskets, which they then pile up in huge mounds against sad houses in miserable villages.¹²³

That afternoon, they reach Lugou Bridge (盧溝橋), the very one Marco Polo described in his famous *Travels* as “unequalled by another in the world.”¹²⁴ Broad, and long, with white marble balustrades carved with lions, it’s one of the wonders of Beijing, written about in poems and verses, including some by the current emperor, whose calligraphy is etched into a large monument on the eastern end: Dawn moon over Lugou (盧溝曉月). These words actually belong to an ancient predecessor: the Zhangzong emperor (r. 1190–1208), under whose reign the bridge was completed. The Zhangzong emperor was not ethnically Chinese but of Jurchen stock, just like Qianlong himself, who has highlighted his connection to this long-ago dynasty by erecting this monument, which stands under pavilions with brilliant yellow roofs. Today there are large troops of dromedaries here, on their way back from the imperial city.

After a slog through a valley of sand, the travelers arrive at a great stone gateway, which announces the start of the imperial road to Beijing. The road is excellent: twenty feet wide and paved with twelve-foot-long stones each a foot thick. It’s good that the road is so sturdy, because the traffic has become intense. “It is scarcely possible,” Van Braam writes, “to imagine the immense number of dromedaries, horses, carts, and mules we met upon the road, or the surprising sensation the whole view excited in our minds. It announced in the most striking manner the proximity of the Imperial residence.”¹²⁵

Titsingh and Van Braam get to Beijing’s outer walls ahead of Guignes and the others, arriving just before sundown and passing into the Outer City, or Chinese City.¹²⁶ Van Braam is surprised that the beautiful pavement stops and the long, wide street (probably 廣安門大街) is just dirt. He’s equally unimpressed by the buildings: “The

houses, which stand on both sides, are devoid of any regularity in form or placement; and the few very elegant shops frequently stand next to miserable hovels.”¹²⁷ They follow the street for forty-five minutes and then head left along another wide street, which takes them to the Xuanwu Gate (宣武門). It’s topped by a magnificent gatehouse, whose thirty-six stately windows they can make out in the darkness. Through the port they go, and into the Inner City, or Manchu City.

They’re eager to get to their accommodations in some great palace or mansion, but instead they’re set down in the street and left for half an hour in the cold darkness. When picked up again, they’re taken the wrong direction: back outside the gate, which promptly closes. No explanation is given. The porters carry them back the way they came and then into a narrow side street, depositing them in a hostel designated for cartmen, whose horses stand in the stables.

Van Braam insists on being taken to a more suitable lodging but is told that nothing can be done. Soon, two of their escorts arrive. Apologizing profusely, they say that they, too, will have to spend the night here.

And so the ambassador and deputy ambassador spend their first night in the capital sleeping on the floor in their clothes. “Thus,” writes Van Braam, “on our arrival at the celebrated residence of the Emperor, were we lodged in a kind of stable! Who could have expected such an adventure?”¹²⁸ Van Braam tells Titsingh that if he’d had the least suspicion that the Chinese would treat them so badly he’d never have set a single letter on paper about sending an embassy. Titsingh writes, “Truly, one must conclude from all of their behavior that we are not among a civilized nation, but under a primitive one, for even in this province, so close to the capital, we enjoyed such a terrible reception.”¹²⁹

Guignes and the others don’t even make it into Beijing. When they reach the outer walls, the gate is shut. “Insolent” soldiers suggest that they just sleep in their carts. They refuse, so a minor official leads them to a “bad hostel” that doesn’t even have any food. Servants go out to try to find food, but there’s nothing to eat anywhere. Fortunately, Guignes has some Chinese buns in his pocket, which five gentlemen share among themselves. “And so,” Guignes writes, “bones half broken, covered with dust, and nearly starving, we arrived finally at Beijing.”¹³⁰

In the morning, the master of the hostel won’t let them leave, demanding money, which their translator refuses to pay. Guignes is amused to watch the two face off, with their heads touching as they yell, “Hit me! I dare you!”¹³¹ The translator is smaller and eventually

climbs into his cart, from which, “retrenched as in a fort,” he screams at the hostelmaster.¹³² Guignes climbs out of his cart, whip in hand, walks to the gate, and opens it. He orders the carts to drive through, and no one stops him. As he later writes in his journal, he must have looked quite frightening: “We all had the look of demons, gaunt and yellow with hunger, with long beards and our lovely bodies enveloped in large cloaks. The host must have thought he was playing host to a troop of devils, especially seeing us leave without paying. Still, he hadn’t given us anything to eat.”¹³³ The translator wants Guignes to give their angry host a few lashes, but Guignes just brandishes the whip to scare him.

The cart drivers jostle through the crowds, managing to get to the front of the long line at the city gate.

Finally, Beijing is ready to receive them. It’s been an exhausting journey, much more difficult than Macartney’s. His lordship enjoyed the comforts of his own flagship all the way from Canton to northern China, disembarking near Beijing’s seaport, Tianjin. From there to Beijing was just eighty miles, most of which he traveled in a stately boat. The Dutch, in contrast, have covered nearly 1,500 miles, mostly by land, and at an extraordinarily grueling pace: nearly thirty miles per day on average. They’re bitter about the privations they encountered, and although they understand that the emperor himself didn’t mean to show disrespect, it was his decision to rush them here.

At least they made it on time. The emperor is eager to show them a good time during this most festive season of the year.¹³⁴

CHAPTER NINE

Beijing

ON JANUARY 10, HIS fiftieth birthday, Titsingh wakes up in a cold stable and steps out into the freezing wind, where he stares in disbelief at the colorful vehicle they expect him to ride in. The wheels are clumsy discs of wood, and the passenger cabin is placed directly on the axles, with no springs or suspensions like those that have cushioned European rides for centuries. A pillow on the floor doesn't help much. "Never before had I sat in a more painful vehicle, and the shocks from driving so fast on the stones gave me a powerful headache."¹

But there's so much to see in the outer city of Beijing. The broad street is paved with huge bluish stones—hence the bumpy ride—and raised in the middle. Just off the pavement are a profusion of stalls filled with household items, clothing, and all kinds of meat: pork, mutton, rabbit, pheasant, partridge. Farther to the side are gilded storefronts with huge golden signs and carvings in wood and stone. "Nowhere," writes Titsingh, "will you find a greater mix of stores and stalls."²

The streets are packed with people, carts, horses, mules, and dromedaries, delightful with their peaceful expressions and majestic gait.³ The traffic is so dense that if you step out of line, you have to wait to find an opening to rejoin. "Dust is fashionable here," quips Guignes.⁴ Every wheel, heel, and hoof throws up the stuff, and although the shopkeepers cover merchandise with tarps and tents, it still gets in everything.

After forty-five minutes or so, the street narrows and crosses a moat, beyond which rises the Xuanwu Gate complex, threshold to the Inner City. They enter a side door, cross a wide gateway, and then snake through another tunnel, emerging into a street as wide as the one they've just left, but cleaner. Workers are spraying down the unpaved sides to hold the dust at bay. The center of the street is filled with stalls and tents for the New Year's celebrations. To Van Braam, it looks like a European fair: "The noise of carriages, horses, mules, and dromedaries; the assemblage of so many men and animals; the appearance of new dresses, manners, and faces; every thing, in short, put in its claim upon my curiosity and captivated my attention."⁵

Many great officials live in the Inner City, and when their green palanquins pass, escorted by suites of officials and officers grandly dressed, people get out of their carts to give them room, but the Europeans' drivers just continue onward along the side of the road, marching northward for a mile and a half, past Hair Lane (頭髮衛衙), White Temple Lane (白廟衛衙), Almsgiving Temple Lane (捨飯寺衛衙⁶), Tannery Warehouse Lane (皮庫衛衙), Grinding Mill Lane (打磨廠衛衙), Tassel Lane (纓子衛衙), and a palace belonging to an imperial prince, its spacious courts and pavilions hidden behind high walls.⁷ Eventually, they turn right and proceed through a wide street to a red brick gatehouse with yellow tile roofs.

This is the Xi'an Gate (西安門), entrance to the imperial gardens (西苑). Few are allowed into this huge, exclusive park, but the travelers are waved through and soon find themselves proceeding along a calm and spacious street, at the end which stands a ceremonial gateway painted in red. On the other side is the Rainbow Bridge (玉轎), famous for its ornate white marble railings and beautifully worked pillars. It crosses North Lake, an ancient manmade waterway whose banks are filled with trees, through whose bare branches the travelers glimpse pavilions and gazebos. To the left, another white marble bridge leads to Jade Flower Island, on whose summit stands the famous White Pagoda (白塔), a Buddhist temple and reliquary.

There's so much to take in, but the gentlemen's attention is drawn to two strange-looking men leading carts toward them over the bridge. They are lamas in red robes and long conical hats, but there's no time to study them. A moment later, the travelers have reached the other side of the Rainbow Bridge and are passing beneath another red gateway and along the walls of the Round Bastion (團城). After yet another gateway, they glimpse for the first time the massive walls of the Forbidden City, with a huge corner gatehouse. Beyond, to the left, rises a tall hill, where temples and gazebos perch among the trees. This is Jing Mountain (景山), which was constructed from the earth

collected when excavating the moats around the Forbidden City. Guignes learns that on the tallest hill, the last emperor who was ethnically Chinese strangled himself, putting an end to the Ming dynasty.⁸



FIGURE 9. “Emperor Qianlong on Horseback Crossing Gold Tortoise Jade Rainbow Bridge,” by Guiseppe Castiglione (郎世寧) (attributed). This painting, from the mid-eighteenth century, depicts the Qianlong emperor around age fifty, some thirty years before he met Titsingh and

Van Braam. North Lake stretches behind him, with Jade Flower Island, crowned by the White Pagoda.

Source: Courtesy of the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC:
Purchase—Smithsonian Collections Acquisition Program and partial gift of Richard G. Pritzlaff, \$1991.60.

They turn to the right and follow a wide and beautiful street southward, paralleling the Western wall of the Forbidden City.⁹ It's much calmer here: just some little carts and a few people on foot and horseback. The buildings are more uniform, set back from the street, and there's a lovely temple.¹⁰ Guignes finds it all quite beautiful. But his mood sours when the porters stop and leave his cart standing in the street.

Apparently the lodging isn't ready and the travelers must wait in the cold until the cleaners have finished. As Van Braam writes, "we were strangely astonished at this proposition and were again obliged to recur to our great remedy—patience." Why the delay? Van Braam learns that a letter from their conductor had said that they wouldn't arrive until after the New Year, so the preparation of the lodging had been deferred. "However," writes Van Braam, "it would have been more prudent and more decent at the same time not to have put it off till the last moment. On the other hand, it must be confessed that two hours suffice to arrange everything in a Chinese house."¹¹

Titsingh feels exposed in his cart. "At each window," he writes, "there were always new people peering in, and it was as though I were in a peepshow."¹² Guignes is farther behind with no honor guard to protect him and doesn't like the way the strange-looking people dressed in black stare at him with a "fierce air," a "hard and cruel" attitude.¹³ He's relieved when his cart starts finally rolling again, entering a narrow alley and stopping in front of a gateway.

Their lodging looks unimpressive from the outside, but on the other side of the gate it's much better.¹⁴ The house, like most Chinese manors, is a series of nested courtyards, in this case three. The outermost has grand halls on either side, and the soldiers and servants begin moving their things in. The better accommodations are toward the rear, which is where the gentlemen go. A main hall between the second and third courtyards becomes Titsingh's main dining room. Flanking it is a smaller room, beyond which a door opens onto the innermost courtyard, where he claims two rooms as office and bedroom. To the right are two rooms for Van Braam. Guignes and the other younger gentlemen move into two rooms in a larger hall on the other side of the courtyard. Being situated at the very end of the house, this space is, in Guignes's words, "sheltered from the often-importunate visits of the Chinese."¹⁵

The accommodations are not like the ornate and comfortable European-style houses they're used to. The walls are covered in a simple white paper, and the windows are made not of glass but of thick, white paper, which lets in light but no views. The laquered Chinese and Japanese cabinets, desks, and dressers that adorn the houses of rich Amsterdammers aren't to be found here. The furniture is minimal, which challenges their ideas about Asian luxury. "One must not imagine," Titsingh writes, "that the furniture consisted of any beautiful furniture or ornate carpets. A few tall square chairs, a wooden table painted brown, and a few rough red or white rugs—this makes up the entirety of our furnishings, to which one can also add two heavy and clumsy tin candlesicks, which are nothing more than little wooden blocks with an iron pin in the middle for the candle."¹⁶ Still, the buildings are nicely constructed, the doorways made of beautifully-worked brown and yellow wood. The former owner was a wealthy man, a high official who became bankrupt right before he died.

It's been uninhabited for six months, and everything's covered in dust. Their servants wipe and scrub, arranging furniture and laying mats on the cold stone floors. Unlike European houses, these apartments have no fireplaces. Instead, they're equipped with heated platforms known as kangs, which serve as bedsteads. Standing a foot and a half high, they're heated by hot coals from within. In the best rooms, the fuel is shoveled in from outside the house, and conduits conduct the heat evenly through the platform. But the kangs aren't lit right now, and it's hard to work with freezing hands. They ask for fire, but firewood is not abundant in the Forbidden City. The imperial records are filled with strict quotas for the imperial households and their dependencies. The travelers' other requests are also difficult to fulfill. "Nothing," writes Van Braam, "was found without a great deal of trouble."¹⁷

At least they receive a warm meal. From the imperial kitchens are brought tins of food arranged around a cylinder filled with hot coals.¹⁸ "It was a good meal," Titsingh writes, "for those who can accustom themselves to Chinese food, which is all prepared with pork and oil. As for us, even half starving, we found little to like about it and contented ourselves with rice and the least disgusting of the dishes."¹⁹ Guignes and the younger gentlemen are less picky, devouring it "like people who have not eaten for two or three days." They use the coals to warm their hands and toast Chinese buns, "which are always only half cooked."²⁰ Europeans like their bread with crust.

They also want to "*faire une toilette plus decete*." "We frightened

ourselves,” Guignes writes, “when we looked in the mirror.”²¹ It’s been weeks since a proper bath, and their faces are gray, dusty, haggard, and sickly. Van Braam has lost weight. “I can truly say,” he writes, “that the circumference of my body was diminished at least five inches.”²²

Yet they’re safe and sound, although Van Braam thinks they couldn’t have taken much more of the grueling travel: “One week more and we should probably have been the victims of sickness, or at least of considerable indisposition; for every one of us already discovered symptoms of an impaired state of health.”²³ He blames this on the pace, the poor accommodations, the inadequate food, and the lack of “aliments” that long habit had made necessary to them (i.e., wine and beer).²⁴

Their main escort, Wang Shiji, provides a different perspective when he makes his report to the Grand Council: “In all the places along the road which were passed, there was no want of provisions and everything that was needful, and although the journey was rather rapid, it was possible to rest from stage to stage. [The ambassador and the other foreigners] were much pleased and did not suffer too much fatigue.”²⁵ Indeed, he says, “the entire journey was very peaceful.”²⁶ He admits to a spot of trouble in Anhui Province, as they approached Shucheng, but that was due to the snow and mud, and it wasn’t serious. They were able to make up the time. He himself, he says, was most solicitous of the foreigners, eager to prevent them from suffering fatigue. In fact, he says, if there was any rushing, it was because the foreigners themselves asked to travel more rapidly, out of their zeal to meet the emperor. These are the sorts of words that the emperor likes to hear.

After making his report, Wang Shiji comes to visit the Europeans in their lodging, along with another escort. Guignes finds their behaviour suspiciously solicitous, writing that they’re going out of their way to appear honest and affable. This is, he suspects, because they’re worried that the foreigners—and above all Guignes and Agie, who speak Chinese—will complain to court officials about their treatment during the voyage. “They’re imbeciles,” Guignes writes, “and take us for imbeciles as well.” Guignes has come to detest Wang Shiji: “a liar, an idiot, and, above all, extremely arrogant.”²⁷

Fortunately, they’ve been provided with another official to take care of them during their stay in Beijing, an official wearing a crystal button in his cap.²⁸ He makes arrangements to provision the Europeans’ cooks, so that Titsingh won’t have to eat any more greasy food, and promises are made to replace the weak, oily, “detestable” milk with actual cow’s milk.

Eventually, he even provides them with fire. As it grows dark, braziers are brought, and after a light dinner, the travelers climb on their kangas to get some rest. These rooms aren't meant to be heated from inside. It gets smoky, so Guignes and the other gentlemen send the braziers out and huddle against the cold. Wrapping his hands in bandages to keep them from freezing, Guignes records the day's events in his journal, ending with an expression of gratefulness that he can finally go to bed "without having to fear the usual prospect of being awoken tomorrow to climb onto horrible horses or in carts."²⁹ Van Braam, too, expresses his gratitude for "a sound and grateful sleep, an enjoyment we had been deprived of ever since we had ceased to travel by water, and consequently for a whole month."³⁰ Titsingh ends his entry for the day with a similar sentiment: "After a miserly dinner, we went to bed early, something that was granted to me very seldom since the 10th of December."³¹

The following day—January 11—starts with a big fish. Titsingh is barely dressed when it's delivered by a high official and his suite: a twelve-foot long sturgeon weighing 200 pounds.³² The official who brings it wears a peacock feather in his cap—a mark of the emperor's personal favor—and informs them that this is a signal honor: Only the emperor is allowed to have this kind of fish. "Great care," Van Braam writes, "was taken to relate to us all these particulars, and to add, that his Majesty treated us more favourably than the English who came last year to Peking, since so signal an honour was never conferred upon them."³³ This type of sturgeon is caught only in the Amur River region, which runs through the emperor's ancestral homelands. Known as the king of the fish, this delicacy is sent directly to Beijing as a tribute item. The old emperor loves it, and one of his poems notes its martial appearance, describing it as wearing a helmet like an imperial guardsman.³⁴ It's customary to greet gifts from the emperor with a kowtow, so Titsingh and Van Braam duly touch their heads to the ground three times three. They're eager to taste the fish, but it's frozen solid, and their cooks lack axes or saws.

Officials say that tomorrow the visitors will meet the emperor. Titsingh asks that the meeting be delayed: the younger gentlemen don't have their luggage yet and would be ashamed to appear in dirty traveling clothes.³⁵ The officials say that the emperor is eager to see everyone just as they are after such an exhausting journey. They insist that everyone must be ready at four o'clock in the morning.

Titsingh is in fact somewhat relieved about the early morning departure. He's been rereading his Nieuwhof, who describes how the ambassadors had to spend the entire night outside waiting for the emperor, who didn't appear until seven in the morning and then only

briefly. “This had made me worried,” Titsingh writes, “that something similar might happen, so I was very pleased with these arrangements.”³⁶

Officials also ask for a French copy of the official letter from Batavia, since no one in the court reads Dutch. This offers Guignes an opportunity to try to open communication with the French missionaries. He knows some of them and has carried out various items of business for them in Canton. He also has letters for them. He doesn’t know whether they know he’s here, and there’s been no way to send a direct message, so after translating the letter, he conspicuously signs his own name and writes the date prominently.³⁷ (Later, Van Braam will claim the sole credit for translating the letter, but in reality, Guignes is the one who does it.) The letter is handed to Wang Shiji to convey to the authorities.³⁸

The rest of the day is spent quietly—a delightful change, although Van Braam is frustrated by a late dinner, which makes him reassess his Sinophilia:

We lived again very abstemiously this day; for little or nothing was to be got. Our provisions were brought so late that we did not dine till the afternoon was far advanced. We found besides that our repast in the capital was full as bad as upon the road. Every moment we have fresh cause of astonishment, and new reasons to perceive how very erroneous were the opinions we had formed of the Chinese nation.³⁹

They’ll have plenty more material to assess China the next day, which begins early, and loudly.

Ice Games

ON THE DAY they'll meet the emperor—January 12, 1795—a shrill voice reverberates through the courtyards at three in the morning. The owner of the voice has been tasked with waking them up, and soon the soldiers are putting on their best uniforms, the gentlemen are trading underwear around, and servants are applying combs and curlers and hair powder. Wigs and coiffures are going out of style in Europe, but the Europeans have been advised to coif themselves and powder their hair.¹ Long curly hair is part of Europeans' exotic appeal. Qianlong's father, the Yongzheng emperor, even liked to have the court painters depict him in European hairstyles and costumes.²

Titsingh and Van Braam are first to walk out into the darkness, where little two-wheeled carts wait for them: blue, with windows in the sides. They seat themselves on the black cushions and jolt along the alleyway, turning right onto the main street. Guignes and the others follow on foot.

A few minutes later they arrive before the Western Gate (西華門) of the Forbidden City, one of its main entrances. The emperor passes through it when going to the Western Gardens, which is what he's going to do today. It's too dark to see much, but the travelers can tell that the plaza in front is busy. People rush back and forth, pulling carts. It's very cold.

The travelers are led into a low-ceilinged room illuminated only by a taper on a candlestick.³ Crude chairs and benches stand here and there, and a single small table. Fire burns in a brazier. Their attendants say that usually people must wait for the emperor

outdoors, so this is a mark of special favor. They're shown to a heated platform, where they sit and examine the other guests. Thirty ambassadors are to be presented to the emperor today, but most of the people here look like Qing officials. Only one seems to be a dignitary: an attractive young man with a ring in his ear who, they're told, is called "To-lo-kon."⁴



FIGURE 10. Portrait of Qianlong's father, the Yongzheng (雍正) Emperor, coiffed as a European nobleman. When this painting was made, in the early 1700s, the Yongzheng Emperor was still a prince, who enjoyed having himself painted in various costumes.

Source: Portrait of Prince Yinchen 胤禛 (the future Yongzheng 雍正 Emperor), early 1700s. Palace Museum, Beijing. Public domain.

At six in the morning, they're brought out to another area, where, beneath a beautiful gateway, they find four elderly men huddled around a fire under an awning. Their dress is strange: old-fashioned

Chinese robes with golden sashes and tall hats of brown fur. They're Koreans, the closest of China's foreign friends, and the gentlemen are surprised to find them waiting outside under a "common tent."⁵ They're also surprised by their dirty green robes and filthy white undergarments.

Unfortunately, there's little time to try to communicate. The sun is coming up, and the Europeans are escorted back into the plaza. Now they can see the Western Gate itself, a beautiful stone structure with three closed portals. To the left and right of it stretch the high red-brick walls of the Forbidden City, against which are built long gallery-like structures with rooms for servants. Below the walls runs a wide frozen moat. The gentlemen are confused. They thought they were in the palace. They don't yet realize that the capital is walls within walls within walls.

Everything is in motion. Great mandarins, with their robes and embroidered patches—pheasants, geese, peacocks—walk pell-mell among Mongols, Tibetans, Manchus, and Koreans, while servants and attendants rush around, pushing carts and wheelbarrows. Titsingh is bemused by the disorder: "Important and unimportant, rich and poor were all wandering around mixed up, bumping together without any distinction. Such a scene of confusion surprised us."⁶ They expected to witness the calm propriety that missionaries have written of, the way that the Board of Rites organizes audiences and ceremonies.

People begin arranging themselves on either side of a raised pathway of smooth gray stone that runs the length of the plaza from the middle portal gate. This marks the imperial way, which the emperor will be carried along. Titsingh and Van Braam are surprised to learn that they, too, are supposed to greet the emperor here. They had imagined presenting their diplomatic letter in its gold box in some elegant throne room instead of outside in the freezing cold. But they follow their guides through the crowds to find the place to wait. Except that their guides don't seem to know where they're going. They pull the Europeans this way and that, while the servants, who are carrying the robes, struggle to keep up. Guignes and the younger gentlemen find this all funny, especially when the escorts disagree among themselves.

But what's less funny are the people who crowd around and prod them. The Europeans are the most exotic guests here, and people are eager for a glimpse, and a feel. The Koreans are the worst—not so much the old gentlemen but the others in the coterie, who grab and touch, putting their bare hands in the Europeans' carefully done hair.

The Koreans' journals and reports note how oddly these Westerners dress. They don't braid their hair or put it up in a bun but

rather just tie it crookedly behind the head with strips of satin. They wear black felt hats shaped like lotus leaves, with strange white feathers. They dress in bizarre robes that are fastened with large round buttons instead of sashes or cords and which are so short that they leave the legs entirely showing. They also wear tight shirts and pants, which restrict their movement, so they're unable to bend their four limbs.⁷ And what faces! "Their deep-set eyes and protruding noses make a strange appearance, with the result that people stand around them shouting and laughing at such a strange sight."⁸

The pointing and laughing the Europeans can stand, but not the grabbing and touching. Guignes writes, "These gross people respect nothing." Imperial guards strike left and right with their whips, curing the Koreans of their "excessive curiosity."⁹

Eventually a place is found for the Europeans along the imperial way, quite far away from the Western Gate, past Moslems, Mongols, Manchus, and Koreans. About this time, everything goes silent.

The side portals of the gate open and disgorge servants and scores of people on unimpressive horses, everyone proceeding "in the greatest disorder." Then the emperor emerges from the central portal on a yellow palanquin, carried by eight men dressed in gold with feathers in their caps.¹⁰ A great number of high officials go on either side, and in front walk officers wearing swords and carrying a golden banner. The emperor stops for a moment in front of the Koreans and says a few words, but he seems eager to move on to the Europeans.

When the imperial palanquin stops in front of him, Titsingh presents the Dutch letter the way he's been taught, kneeling and raising the golden box with both hands above his head. An official delivers it to the emperor, at which Titsingh and Van Braam take off their hats and kowtow nine times. Taking off hats is an odd little courtesy particular to these Western Ocean people. In a book about "Tributaries" that the emperor himself commissioned, one can find an entry for people from Holland, which says that "when meeting others they consider it polite to hold their hats under one arm."¹¹ Behind Titsingh and Van Braam, Guignes and the others also remove their hats and kowtow, although Guignes notes that "our salute was not entirely according to the etiquette, because we were too curious to see everything happening around us, and no one was paying any attention to us."¹²

The emperor, dressed in black fur, gazes on the ambassadors with a pleased expression. He's old but has a nice air about him, a "bonne mine."¹³

"Where are you from?" He asks, as an interpreter translates.¹⁴

"From Holland," Titsingh says.

“How old is your sovereign?”

“Forty-six years old,” says Titsingh.

“Is your country at peace?”

Titsingh says Holland enjoys a profound peace, which isn’t true, because Titsingh knows that the Netherlands is at war with France. What he doesn’t know is that even as he speaks, French armies are advancing toward Amsterdam and that within days, the Dutch Republic will cease to exist.

“How is your health?” asks the emperor. “Did you not experience considerable fatigues and difficulties in traveling such a long way?”

Titsingh responds that he’s well and that he and his companions are grateful for the kindnesses they’ve received from the emperor during their trip.

“Are you not cold?” asks the emperor. Unlike most other guests, the Europeans aren’t wearing their fur robes, having removed them so that the emperor could see them in their finery. The Koreans find it very odd that anyone would want to remove one’s robes and appear before the emperor in underwear.¹⁵

Titsingh says he is fine.

The emperor expresses satisfaction at how well Titsingh and Van Braam have carried out the Chinese ceremonies, despite being foreigners. Then, taking the golden box with the letter, the emperor is carried forth along the imperial way.¹⁶

Everyone stands up and follows. The crowd is so thick and moves so quickly that the gentlemen are alarmed. “Each of us,” writes Van Braam, “was taken under the arm by a Mandarin and dragged along in a manner which, in our country, would be considered as characteristic of the greatest incivility and rudeness, though here it could only be regarded as a testimony of zeal and attention.”¹⁷

This strange stampede after the emperor, the casual and disordered procession that preceded it, the confusing social mixing, the mix-ups about where the ambassadors were to kneel, even the plain and simple palanquin the emperor rode in—all these details contrast with the missionary accounts that the Europeans have read. Van Braam writes, “I confess I was much struck, both with the concourse of curious spectators, and with the confusion that prevailed among them to such a degree, that anyone might have imagined himself in the midst of a savage nation that had never entertained the least idea of civilization.” He reflects on what he’s read about the famous Chinese Board of Ceremonies, which is supposed to regulate audiences so carefully:

I recollected the boasted tribunal of the *Li Bu*, or of rites and usages, and I

asked myself, upon seeing no signs of order, but a real chaos, on what occasion it was that it exercised its punctilious and rigid influence? A fine subject for reflection, if we had not been freezing, while gazing on the scene. A man must have been witness to such an occurrence in order to form the least idea of it; but from my personal experience, I could never have believed that things could have been in such a state of disturbance at the court of the Chinese Monarch.¹⁸

What he and the others don't realize is that this event isn't a formal ceremony. Dressed in a simple fur coat, the emperor is on his way to a sporting event: the annual Ice Games (冰嬉).¹⁹ The games are a winter highlight here in the capital city. The crowd is festive and excited, which is why Titsingh and the others find themselves driven forward among "a frightening mass of people."²⁰

They rush westward and through another gate (西苑門) into the imperial gardens. When the emperor reaches the shore of Taiye Lake (太液湖), he gets out of his palanquin and climbs into a golden sleigh, which officials pull across the ice. Everyone follows.²¹ It's slippery, and some fall, including their escort Wang Shiji. "But, it's no matter," writes Titsingh, "because the Chinese wear such thick clothing that this cannot harm them."²² The Europeans, with their ridiculous clothes, are more fragile. Officials support them by the arms.

The emperor leaves his sleigh near a beautiful pavilion and disappears behind a gateway, while Titsingh and the others are led to a nearby building.²³ It looks stately from the outside but inside is cold, dark, and empty, with just a few cushions on the floor next to small wooden tables. They're meant to sit here cross-legged to eat breakfast, but they can't position themselves comfortably and remain standing. Last year the English were allowed to forgo certain ceremonies because of their tight pants, so the escorts quickly arrange another room for the Dutch, which has taller tables and benches. This new room is better, but to Van Braam, it still seems like little more than a common European guardhouse:

On looking around us, we were struck with the greatest astonishment, of which we only got the better to reflect, that being received in such apartments in the Imperial Palace, we had had little reason to complain of the bad lodgings to which we had sometimes been taken on the road. We concluded also, upon making the same comparison, that the hotel in which we were lodged at Peking was a magnificent place of abode. This picture will perhaps accord ill with the brilliant accounts that the Missionaries have sent to Europe of this capital, and of the palace of the Emperor.... [N]othing but my own eyes could have convinced me of its reality.²⁴

They're served food, which they eat in the company of tall eunuchs with high voices, one of whom looks exactly like a very old woman.²⁵ The emperor sends a dish from his own table: butter cakes filled with red preserves, presented in the form of flowers. They kowtow in thanks, but before they can eat, their escorts shove forward and start grabbing the pastries for themselves. These men are, writes Guignes, "fairly gourmand for Chinese"²⁶ and must be held back by palace officers until the Europeans are done. The cakes are delicious, but a second imperial dish is not. It's a plate of "wild thighs" that to Titsingh look like leftovers, as though someone had gnawed away the flesh and then thrown the bones "down onto the table in front of us." He kowtows but refuses to eat, and the experience affects him deeply:

Although this was apparently a sign of his favor, it nonetheless presented an appearance of the most thorough rudeness and barbarity. No matter how unbelievable people in Europe might find this, it is too remarkable to not mention. From the accounts which the missionaries have tried to mislead the world for years with, I had imagined a very civilized and enlightened people. These ideas were very deeply rooted, and a sort of violence was necessary in order to rip them out, but this reception, paired with what we had already encountered, proved to be a radical cure.²⁷

None of the other gentlemen mention the gnawed-on thighs. Maybe Titsingh is having a bad day.

After breakfast, they're taken back onto the ice "in the same tableau of confusion," as Titsingh writes. Manchus, gaily dressed, are skating around—and not too badly, in Guignes's opinion. Officials press Titsingh to give it a try, but he declines. It's been thirty years since he last skated, and the ice is full of cracks, which is quite different from the way the emperor sometimes describes it in his poems: even and shiny like a jade mirror, so that the skaters twirling on the ice are reflected like phoenixes flying in the sky.²⁸

Agie and Van Braam the younger decide to join in, but they don't like Manchu skates. The skates are attached by means of ribbons wrapped around the foot, and the blades are thinner, lower, and longer in the back, stretching past the heel. They're also shorter in front, ending abruptly at a right angle, rather than curving upward like European skates, which makes it hard to stop and easy to fall over when leaning forward. Servants rush back to the Europeans' lodging to fetch European skates. As the young gentlemen strap them on and glide out onto the ice, everyone pushes forward to watch—noblemen, officials, laborers, slaves. Guards crack whips to hold them

back.

Some grandees are watching from sleighs, wrapped in warm furs. The younger Van Braam approaches one of the most impressive ones: a gentleman accompanied by a court of his own, with peacock-feathered officials to pull his sleigh. The man greets him and lifts him up onto his sleigh, but their conversation is cut short, because the emperor has finished his breakfast and is ready to start the games.

His imperial highness comes out onto the ice and climbs into his sleigh, which is large and has beautiful golden dragons painted against a red background on the sides and a yellow canopy like an umbrella on top. Qianlong loves sleighs and pens a verse about them:

As boats go on water and carts go on land,
Each aiding people's effort in its own way,
So rope sleighs, specially made in olden times,
Can pull one forth upon the ice.
Today, warriors practice their arts on the ice,
Vying for the ball.
Banners pursue (each other), and rewards are distributed.²⁹

As he slides forth, nobles and officials follow on foot, wrapped in their fur coats. Once he comes to a stop on the frozen lake, the emperor orders that the Europeans be placed near him so that they have a good view.

They're happy for this kindness, because they're as interested in him as in the skating. The old sovereign sits straight, a kindly look on his face, a thin beard on his chin. He's looking out over the ice. On the other side of the lake, roofs of pavilions show through trees, and the odd cylindrical top of the White Pagoda rises in the distance. About half a mile away, a group of men wait under a tall banner. This is the starting line for the first event, Speed Skating (搶等). They're dressed in bright gold or red uniforms and wear skates and knee guards.³⁰ They've been selected from the finest of the Manchu armed forces to compete.

The emperor gives a command. A man fires a gun near the imperial sled. At the starting line, there's a puff of smoke and a moment later a report. The skaters are off, racing directly toward the emperor.³¹ The first to arrive is grabbed by an official and the two fall together. All the skaters behind fall, too. Van Braam thinks it's sloppy skating: "As if they had not the art of stopping themselves with their heels, as Europeans do when going at full speed, these Chinese, unable to check their rapidity, let themselves fall upon the

ice as soon as they came close up to the sled, in order that they might not run over the Emperor.”³² But falling on the ice is part of the game, and the emperor personally rewards the skaters. The games are not just about fun and military exercise. They’re an occasion to distribute New Year’s gifts and money to the soldiers and their families.³³

The next event begins soon afterward: Grab-ball (搶球), sort of like rugby on skates. Two teams gather on the ice, one in red and one in gold. An official kicks a white leather ball between them, at which the players scramble to grab it by the ribbon that hangs from it. When one gets the ball, he throws it up again, to be caught and thrown yet again. The Europeans are confused. “This game,” writes Guignes, “didn’t mean much.”³⁴ The troops are constantly leaping over one another and falling. It doesn’t last long. Soon the troops are being rewarded by the emperor, with the ones who managed to catch the ball receiving the best rewards.³⁵

The emperor’s sleigh is pulled to the last event, “Coiling Dragon, Shooting Ball” (轉龍射球). Two bamboo gateways stand some distance apart, each with a disk hanging down from the center. Suspended from the disk is a ball surrounded by multicolored silk streamers. The ball is called the Heavenly Sphere. Not far away from each gateway, another ball lies on the ice: the Earthly Orb. Hundreds of people begin skating, dressed in long robes with tiger skin. They’re in groups of three, with the first of the trio carrying a bright banner or two and the other two wielding bows and arrows. They snake in huge loops around the ice. When they pass beneath a gateway, the archers shoot at the Heavenly Sphere and the Earthly Orb. The skaters start older and get younger, the last one a very small boy. Throughout this event, the emperor keeps looking at the Europeans, as though to gage whether they like what they’re seeing. Van Braam does: “This exercise was performed with great order, and almost all were dexterous enough to hit the target, though they moved with great rapidity, and put themselves into all the elegant attitudes of European archers. The children shewed particular dexterity.”³⁶ Titsingh is less impressed, feeling that this event requires little skill and that many of the archers miss their marks.³⁷

The emperor gives out more gifts, and with that, the games end. His sleigh turns back toward the palace. The Europeans, in their thin clothing, are eager to get back to their lodgings, too. “Our shoes,” writes Guignes, “were too thin for standing so long on ice.”³⁸



FIGURE 11. Ice games. “Coiling Dragon Shooting Ball” (轉龍射球), one of the events in the annual Beijing Ice Games (冰嬉). The athletes skate in long, twirling patterns, and as they pass through the gateway, those armed with bows shoot at the Heavenly Sphere hanging from above.

Source: Detail from “Hehua bingxi tu” 合畫冰嬉圖, painting by Zhang Weibang 張為邦 and Zhao Wenhan 姚文瀚, mid-1700s. Palace Museum, Beijing. Public domain.

But there’s a change of plans. Instead of going home, they’re to enter the Forbidden City.

They’re told that they’ll be meeting the “Prime Minister,” Heshen (和珅), a man who, Titsingh notes, “has the entire government in his hands and is therefore often called the Little Emperor.”³⁹ They’re led back to the Western Gate Plaza, which Guignes now learns is not actually in the Forbidden City but merely an external plaza outside the gate, where visitors to the palace leave their carts and palanquins. Everyone must go on foot in the Forbidden City except the emperor and a few others. As they walk through the massive gate, Van Braam counts out forty-two paces. He’s surprised by the

view on the other side: “On coming out of this passage, we found ourselves in a vast square, paved and surrounded by buildings erected without the least regard to order or regularity.”⁴⁰

The scale is stunning. It goes on and on: hundreds of edifices, most with their own walled courtyards. Stone dragons stare down from yellow-tiled roofs. The workmanship is impressive, fine woods painstakingly varnished, and everything is paved with hewn stone. Yet they also glimpse dirty alleyways, miserable hovels, and heaps of dirt.⁴¹ “Sometimes,” writes Titsingh, “we imagined that we were in impoverished back streets of some city.”⁴²

Eventually they come to a small gateway, and a crowd of dirty people congeals around them, vying to have a look.⁴³ Escorts clear a path into a small courtyard. A shutter slides open, exposing a small glass window in which a man’s face appears and looks at them for a while. They’re admitted, walking up a ramp and into a low, crowded room. People press forward, shoving to get in front. With difficulty, the Europeans are pushed through this room and into a much smaller one, where the prime minister sits in front of a window, one foot raised on cushions. He’s forty-five and wears a kindly expression. Titsingh and Van Braam carry out the kowtow.

“Is there ice in your country?” he asks.

They assure him that Europe has ice, their answer translated by the young Frenchman Agie.

He asks about their health and their clothing and praises them for carrying out the ceremonies so well, to which they reply that they’re sorry for their ignorance of Chinese ways.⁴⁴

Once the interview is over, the ambassadors offer a European-style bow and take their leave, walking back through the palace complex to the Western Palace Gate and then, by cart, back to their lodging. They arrive shivering with cold and very glad to be inside again.⁴⁵

They’ve achieved something few Europeans have done—entered the Forbidden City—and as they warm themselves, they reflect on their experiences. The prime minister was kind and solicitous, but how is it that he—the second-most powerful man in the empire—occupies such a “miserable” office? They’ve heard he also has a grand palace of his own outside the Forbidden City, but how is it that his office is, Van Braam writes, “so small that there is not a common tradesman’s house in Holland which does not contain handsomer and more spacious apartments?”⁴⁶

Equally odd is the social mixing they’ve experienced all day. “Masters and servants were standing promiscuously; and the latter, that they might the better gratify their curiosity by a sight of us, pushed aside the Mandarins without ceremony, and placed

themselves before them.”⁴⁷ The gentlemen find this commingling bizarre and unpleasant, even offensive. As Guignes writes, “the sad redoubt where we saw [Heshen] was all the more insupportable due to the fact that the masters and domestics were all mixed together.”⁴⁸ The experience leads them to question their understanding of China. “Every thing we saw appeared to us inconceivable, and would no doubt have seemed so to any one who could have been witness of this assemblage.”⁴⁹ They’re surprised that this lack of decorum isn’t limited to Heshen. “The Chinese,” Guignes writes, “appear to have little respect for the emperor, because in his gardens and even in his presence one is obliged to distribute lashes with the whip. Everyone presses around and speaks very loudly without paying any attention to the emperor.”⁵⁰

Titsingh believes that this lack of distinction signifies a lack of civilization, due to the mixing of the Manchus and Chinese:

Our meetings today gave us much to think about. Never before had I seen such a mix of ranks. The highest and the lowest touching together, and everywhere the elegant and the rude went hand-in-hand. Even in the room of the Prime Minister one saw common people in dirty clothing pressing in amongst the great mandarins. In the presence of the emperor, whip lashes were administered. The reception, the rooms, the furniture—indeed everything gave a deep impression of Chinese civilization and Tartar barbarity [*ruwheid*] thrown together, but mixing poorly.⁵¹

Titsingh can’t yet know this, but the Manchus have been intentional about this mixing, which is one reason they’ve established such a durable empire. The emperor’s forefathers adopted and adapted Chinese political and ritual structures to Manchu ones, and the current emperor has made deliberate policies to ensure that Manchu ways aren’t lost to new generations, insisting on the use of the Manchu language; sponsoring Manchu translations and literary projects; and supporting activities like the Ice Games, which glorify traditional Manchu pastimes. But this mixing isn’t just between Chinese and Manchu customs. The Qing also adapt and adopt other ways, most notably Tibetan and Mongol. The emperor, like many educated Manchus, is literate in four languages: Chinese, Manchu, Mongolian, and Tibetan. The Qing empire is an imperial melting pot, with the emperor at its center.

Titsingh and the others, having read missionary accounts, expected refinement, ceremony, and dignity and instead experienced an event that felt more like a country fair. But that’s because the day’s celebration *was* like a fair. The Ice Games is not one of the

grand ceremonies that China is famous for, those ancient rituals choreographed by the Board of Rites. It's meant to be fun, more of a sporting event than a rite.

The New Year's season is the most festive part of the year, and the emperor and his courtiers are eager to share it with their visitors. There will be parties, tours, plays, wrestling, acrobatics, fireworks—and, of course, banquets, banquets, and banquets. The Europeans will come to understand much better the richness of Qing imperial culture, but that will take many, many meetings and encounters. And that can be exhausting.

Favored Guests of the Emperor

AN OLD EUNUCH SITS at the table and watches as Titsingh and the other gentlemen eat a meal in their residence.¹ He asks for a taste of Titsingh's brandy. Typically, Titsingh wouldn't drink brandy with dinner, but the cases of wine still haven't arrived. Titsingh pours a glass. The eunuch likes it and asks for another, as well as one of the Wedgewood dinner plates and some biscuits, so he can take them back to Heshen. Titsingh obliges, and the eunuch praises the Dutch for their courtesy "at the expense of the English."²

The eunuch says the emperor is uncommonly pleased with the Dutch, and many others say the same. Gestures of imperial favor follow one another—dried grapes from Manchuria, pouches of tobacco, dishes from the imperial kitchen, the huge fish—as do promises of unprecedented favors to come, including plans to show "things that no foreigner as yet had ever beheld."³

Yet they don't always feel like honored guests. "We had constantly imagined to ourselves," writes Titsingh, "that once we arrived in Beijing, all the troubles would be over, but we found that it's really no better here." Firewood is scanty and of such poor quality that even Titsingh himself sometimes must go without heat in the eighteen-degree cold. Sometimes there's not even enough to cook dinner.⁴

Not that there's much food in any case. Upon arrival, they were

asked to make a list of daily necessities. They did, and it was duly translated into Chinese and entrusted to the old official in charge of room and board (he had fulfilled the same function for the British). Yet the guests feel that they're not receiving as much as listed, and the goods seem to be of poor quality. Each day they press the man for improvements, to no avail. Their servants say it's not his fault: "We heard that all that we had requested was indeed delivered, being brought each morning to a house across from ours, but that the mandarins kept the best for themselves, for the most part making money from it, giving us only the bare necessities and making fun of our complaints."⁵

The travelers increasingly blame their escorts from Canton, who, they feel, have paid scant attention to their welfare, diverting imperial largesse into their own pockets. "We discovered," writes Guignes, "that one of the minor mandarins who had accompanied us from Canton to here had earned three thousand taels by appropriating the money that each town governor had provided for our domestics."⁶ They even suspect that the escorts have deliberately left behind many of their trunks and crates in order to profit from transport costs, depriving the gentlemen of essentials like underwear and wine.⁷

Most troubling, the escorts haven't properly cared for the gifts for the emperor, most significantly, the two expensive clocks. When the crates containing them arrived in Beijing, Titsingh and the others found the devices smashed into pieces. The escorts tried saying that the clocks were packed badly and so it's not their fault, but the Europeans insist that the blame lies with the Cantonese officials charged with transport, and, in particular, the "third escort," who received large amounts of money to pay porters but "actually used few of them and instead diverted the rest of the money into his own purse, spending nights in merriment and sleeping the days away in his palanquin, without paying attention to the presents."⁸

One of the younger gentlemen says that a few days before reaching Beijing, he was trotting through the cold on his horse when he heard a crash. He rode over to find out what had happened and saw that porters had dropped one of the clock crates onto the frozen ground. The third mandarin was nowhere in sight—nor was any other official. This incident is just one sign of the poor oversight.⁹

Titsingh also blames the escorts for the death of his young Malay servant, who had always been healthy and robust. As Titsingh and the other gentlemen were rushed toward Beijing, the servant, along with many other servants and soldiers, had fallen behind, and over the following days had to trudge through severe freezes and a major

snowstorm. He and the others later reported that they lacked adequate clothing, food, and shelter.¹⁰ When the servant finally arrived at the lodging, three days after Titsingh, he was suffering from a high fever and had been unable to eat or drink for several days.¹¹ The emperor sent a doctor (at least according to a Chinese source¹²), but the man died, “the first victim of the evil conduct and greed of our escorts.”¹³

The “third mandarin,” who is in charge of the gentlemen’s luggage and the presents, visits the lodging shortly after the servant’s death, bringing some luggage and wine. He doesn’t know how sad Titsingh is about his servant’s death, so when the gentlemen ask him where the rest of their things are, he laughs and says they’re still two or three hundred li away, under the care of a minor official.

This “mocking laugh” infuriates Titsingh, who tells the official that he knows all about his tricks and will do whatever is necessary to prevent such conduct in the future. The man leaves without saying anything. “He had not expected,” writes Titsingh, “such a clear declaration and crept away with his tail between his legs.”¹⁴

Van Braam worries that Titsingh has overreacted:

Perhaps he was less blameable than we imagined, since it is so difficult to manage the coolies, as we ourselves had but too well experienced: but it is the nature of man to complain without always considering whether those to whom he addresses his reproaches deserve them; and woe to the innocent who is exposed to this kind of vengeance. It is nevertheless true, that it is exceedingly unpleasant for our gentlemen to be reduced, from the want of their trunks, to the necessity of borrowing linen.¹⁵

Instead, Van Braam places the blame on the laborers themselves. “I have repeatedly said that no Mandarin is able to control that class of men, the very refuse of the Chinese nation.”¹⁶

But it’s not just the lack of food and poor treatment that’s so distressing. The Europeans also feel, as Titsingh puts it, “shut in a prison.”¹⁷ Guards are posted at the gate of their lodging, ostensibly for security, but the Chinese servants say they’ve been warned not to carry out errands under penalty of death, and officials have said that the Europeans should not try to send messages, especially to missionaries.¹⁸

This is confusing, because the emperor seems genuinely pleased with them. As Van Braam writes, “there was something very strange in the treatment we met with. On one hand we received a great deal of attention, while on the other we were kept absolutely confined to our hotel and watched as if we had been so many prisoners.”¹⁹

Other visitors to the capital also notice this strange treatment. The Korean ambassadors record that “military guards are sent for the comings and goings [of the Hollanders], and to guard over their lodgings, and it’s forbidden for people to try to have contact or communication with them.”²⁰ In the past, Koreans, too, were watched carefully, but now they’re allowed to wander the capital at will, so long as they don’t attempt to access restricted areas, although they sometimes do, trying, for example, to look at the imperial observatory, a dangerous game. Even climbing the wall to peek over the top might carry the death penalty.²¹ The Koreans don’t understand why the Europeans are watched so carefully. “It’s not clear,” they write, “what the meaning of this is.”²²

The Europeans think they know: it’s the fault of Wang Shiji and the other escorts who accompanied them from Canton. These men are anxious to prevent the Europeans from telling Heshen about the way that the Dutch were mistreated during the voyage and how the escorts damaged gifts for the emperor.²³

The gentlemen decide that Titsingh should send a letter about these matters directly to Heshen.²⁴ Writing in French, which Heshen can have translated by the missionaries, Titsingh describes the poor conduct of the escorts during the journey—the forced marches, the lack of food, the poor lodging, the embezzling. He describes the escorts’ failure to properly supervise the transport of the gifts, describing the way that the crate carrying the clock was dropped. He requests that the escorts be dismissed and new ones appointed.²⁵

But Titsingh has a change of heart when his Chinese servants come to complain to him about how the officials and escorts have mistreated them, stealing their money and threatening them. They’re so frustrated that they “express themselves quite freely about the mandarins,” providing him an opportunity “to inquire about this and that.” He learns to his “amazement” that Heshen is on the side of the officials from Canton and is known to be a declared protector of the viceroy and the superintendant of maritime trade. “This made me think,” Titsingh writes, “about the possible consequences of the letter, and about what kind of troubles I might be exposed to on my voyage back to Canton.” He confers with Van Braam and some of the other gentlemen, who seem to agree: “Handing the letter over would be risking too much. It would be wiser to arm ourselves with patience and suffer than to embitter them towards us by means of such an action.”²⁶

One of the younger gentlemen thinks it’s a mistake not to send the letter. Van Braam’s nephew, Jacob Andries van Braam, writes, “It was a right good letter and would certainly have been effective ... but the

ambassador, due to his characteristic indecisiveness, changed his mind.”²⁷

Who is right? Probably Titsingh. Unbeknownst to them all, the Korean envoys have noticed that Heshen himself seems to be behind the unusual restrictions on Dutch communications: “Foreign country ambassadors are managed by the ministers of the Board of Rites, but the Dutch are also being inspected by Heshen.”²⁸ It is he, they believe, who is dispatching the guards to watch over the Dutch. The Koreans aren’t fond of Heshen. They see his rise as a sign of decadence and disorder: “As Heshen’s power grows and flourishes more with each day, the nation and the people look upon him with anger. He openly accepts bribes, and it is said that he is more affluent than even the Imperial Princes.... Since the emperor turned eighty, [the number of] subjects of the Royal Court trying to gain Heshen’s favor through flattery has increased.”²⁹ The Koreans refuse to propitiate Heshen: “Since the ambassadors of our country do not give Heshen bribes, he cares the least about our doings.”³⁰ But given that Heshen is currently the most important man in the empire, aside from the emperor himself, it’s probably wise for the Dutch not to irritate him.

In any case, Titsingh feels that he has no choice, and so he retires to his chambers and refuses to see officials. He lets people tell them he’s sick, but mostly he’s just despondent. “I wished with all my heart that I was not here.”³¹ When officials ask him to come into the Forbidden City again to officially deliver the emperor’s presents, he says Van Braam should go instead.

Van Braam is happy to oblige. At six in the morning, he enters the palace and is brought to “a miserable apartment, a comparison with which would disgrace a Dutch guard-house.”³² He waits there for nearly two hours, in the company of some grand officials who wear the peacock feather. Finally, two high officials ask him to give them the presents. He does and then waits further, sipping tea, until finally, around nine o’clock, he’s taken to Heshen, who is lying down with a gouty foot.³³ Van Braam is once again surprised to find this great man in such a small room, barely big enough for six people to crowd around the bed.

Van Braam kneels and explains that Titsingh is too ill to come. Heshen asks whether the Dutch have a good doctor in their suite. Van Braam says he hopes that Titsingh will be better by this evening but if not, he will take the liberty of asking for a physician from the court. Heshen says it sounds as though Van Braam himself has a cold and attributes it to Van Braam’s thin clothing. Van Braam says he caught the cold during the journey to Beijing. Heshen asks if he

might not need some medicine. Van Braam says he hopes he can do without. After a few more words, the interview ends. Van Braam finds these attentions gratifying and describes Heshen as polite and friendly.³⁴

As he leaves the room, someone grabs his arm: an old, gray-bearded missionary, who has pushed his way through the crowd.³⁵

This is just the opportunity Van Braam has been waiting for. He and the others have been unable to get in contact with the missionaries, so this morning, Guignes wrote a bunch of small notes, which say, in Latin, that he and his companions have letters for the missionaries.³⁶ Van Braam takes one of these notes out of his pocket and extends his hand, saying in Portuguese that he and his comrades would love a chance to meet with the missionaries at their lodging. The man says, "We shall shortly meet again." But suddenly, the missionary is "pulled violently away."³⁷ A moment later, Van Braam sees the note in the hands of an official.

Van Braam returns to the lodging, and as he's telling the others about this occurrence, two officials arrive and summon Guignes, the author of the notes. Guignes goes with them, accompanied by a translator, the house manager, and many other "Chinese." He's taken into the Forbidden City and brought to a small room filled with officials.

They place the note in front of him and ask for an explanation. Guignes says that the note merely greets the missionaries and informs them that he has brought letters for them from Canton.³⁸ They ask whether the note was perhaps delivered by mistake. He thinks they want him to say yes. He replies firmly that it wasn't and says he wrote it himself. They ask to see the letters he brought. He says he intends to hand them to their intended recipients. They ask what's in the letters. He says he doesn't know, because he doesn't have the right to open them.

They write down everything he says in Manchu and take their notes into a neighboring apartment. After some time, a man emerges, whom Guignes calls the Nan-san-da-yin and describes as Heshen's "confidant" and "factotum."³⁹ Guignes doffs his hat. His translator gets to his knees, but the Nan-san-da-yin has him stand up again. Guignes is pleased by these attentions. He finds the man "very friendly," with a pleasant countenance.⁴⁰

The Nan-san-da-yin asks Guignes whether the note contains anything else. Guignes says no. He says he accompanied the ambassador out of curiosity and in the hope of meeting again with the missionary Mr. Nicolas Raux, whom he's known for a long time, ever since they were shipmates on the voyage from Europe to the

Indies. He reassures the Nan-san-da-yin that the members of the embassy have no intention of delivering any kind of complaint to the missionaries.

"I can see that you're sincere," the man says, apparently satisfied.⁴¹ He offers presents, which Guignes declines, and promises that there will be an opportunity to meet Missionary Raux, just not quite yet.

Finally, the Nan-san-da-yin asks whether the Europeans are receiving adequate provisions. Guignes says, to the translator, "I would be able to say no, but I would rather say yes, in the belief that after this our mandarins will take care of us better in the future."⁴²

Guignes returns to the lodging, and later the Nan-san-da-yin comes in person to visit Titsingh in his sickbed. Titsingh is charmed by his solicitude, especially by his order that a fire be continually stoked in the firepit in the courtyard, from which heating ducts run under Titsingh's house.⁴³

The official asks whether Titsingh will be able to go to the palace tomorrow and have an audience with the emperor. Titsingh says, alas, he won't be able to because of his illness. He promises to go the day after that, although he notes in his journal that "my illness is a result more of grief and heartache than of real sickness."⁴⁴

So the Nan-san-da-yin visits Van Braam, who's also won over: "His address is pleasing and his countenance very prepossessing."⁴⁵ Van Braam agrees to see the emperor the next day.

He gets an early start, being en route by four-thirty in the morning. Instead of entering the Forbidden City through the Western Gate, as he did before, he is taken southward along the walls and brought into the Meridian Gate Square (午門).⁴⁶ This area is part of the main sacred axis of the capital, which leads to the series of nested courtyards that form the formal, sacred approach to the emperor. In the starlight, the huge square stretches northward as far as Van Braam can see, lined with galleries on each side. As it starts to get lighter, he sees the Meridian Gate itself to the north, a huge red building with two massive wings that reach out toward him on both sides. It was built to awe and inspire, and it does. "Everything," Van Braam writes, "is proportioned according to the laws of the most rigid symmetry, and the whole has an air of uncommon grandeur."⁴⁷

Today, the second-to-last day of the year in China, the emperor will perform the year-end sacrifices (禘祭) to the ancestors. It's customary for high officials and grandees—including ambassadors—to greet him as he goes to the imperial ancestral temple (太廟).

Van Braam waits and waits until finally the Meridian Gate's middle portal opens and the emperor emerges, carried in procession.

Van Braam watches, kneeling, as the palanquin passes and disappears through a gate to the east. They'd like him to wait here for the emperor's return, but they'd also like him to have company, so they send for his nephew. The younger Van Braam doesn't expect this urgent summons and rushes out of the house with curlers still in his hair, arriving just in time for the emperor's return.⁴⁸

The monarch stops in front of the two Van Braams and asks after Titsingh's health. The elder Van Braam gives the requisite response and then, as the palanquin is borne away, the Van Braams perform the kowtow and prepare to return to their lodging, thinking their duties are done for the day. But something unexpected occurs. The Nan-sa-da-yin asks them to accompany him into the palace. The emperor has invited them to a special party.

It's an unprecedented honor. Typically, only guests from within the Great Qing empire are invited to this annual party, and the Grand Council itself suggested that the Dutch not be invited:

According to precedent each year on the 29th day of the 12th month, only Hui people and minorities come inside to watch plays [with the emperor] in the Chonghua Hall, and if none of the ambassadors from Korea or other countries have participated in the past, then officials from the country of Holland should be treated the same way. There's no need to have these ambassadors from the country of Holland enter the palace and watch the plays.⁴⁹

But the emperor makes an exception, and so the Van Braams find themselves heading northward, the imperial direction.

Through the Meridian Gate they pass, and into the vast stone-paved courtyard of the Gate of Supreme Harmony, with the Golden River curving through it. Instead of crossing the Golden River Bridge and proceeding through the huge courtyards that follow one after another, they're directed to the left, westward, up some stairs and through a gateway in the wall.⁵⁰ On the other side Van Braam recognizes a place he's been before: the square behind the Western Gate.

From here, he is taken northward between two walled compounds, crossing the Broken Rainbow Bridge (斷虹橋), with its exquisite marble carvings.⁵¹ After a short wait in a little apartment, an official takes them to a three-port gate.⁵² Official-looking eunuchs keep careful track of who enters and exits, allowing the Van Braams to pass into a courtyard where many more eunuchs bustle about "performing menial offices." The Van Braams believe they're in "the very place of residence of the Emperor."⁵³

They're right. They've just passed into the most forbidden part of the Forbidden City, the vast assemblage of halls and palaces where the emperor and his huge family live. Although only seven of his twenty-five official female companions are still alive, and only four of his seventeen sons and one of his ten daughters, many members of the family live here when the imperial court is in Beijing.

The women aren't supposed to be in contact with men from the outside, but the emperor seems to have arranged this visit partly so that they can observe the Europeans from behind screens.

The Van Braams are led through a maze of narrow streets. The roads are paved with beautiful smooth stones, and everything is clean and in good repair, but there's not much to see, because the "buildings on both sides presented nothing to the eye but dead walls." A young man of about thirty years accosts them for a short conversation. They're told that this is the emperor's youngest son—the seventeenth. They like his manner and "pleasing countenance."⁵⁴

He's a charmer, this son. The Korean ambassadors, eager to learn all they can about the imperial princes, find him "young, superior, and refined."⁵⁵ But they're not sure they approve, because there are disturbing rumors about him: "The 17th Prince is unlearned, ignorant, and unusually perverse; they say he goes out into the markets to play and amuse himself."⁵⁶ They've heard that he's unlikely to inherit the throne and suspect that the heir will be the fifteenth son, who is "magnanimous and open, with a great and wonderful appearance, and the emperor loves him best, and all hopes are placed on him, both within China and beyond."⁵⁷ Unfortunately, number fifteen is much more difficult to meet, because he tends to remain deep in the palace and seldom shows his face.

The Van Braams finally arrive at a little plaza: the Chonghua Palace (重華宮).⁵⁸ It's one of the emperor's favorite places for intimate entertaining, the venue, most famously, of annual tea parties in which the emperor presides over poetry games with a few lucky officials. Van Braam finds it remarkably small and crowded. He and his nephew stand in a small space between a stage and a tiny, dark building where the emperor sits.

They aren't the only envoys today. There are also three Koreans and eight men who have features so Western that the elder Van Braam mistakes them for European missionaries. He looks carefully, hoping to recognize his friend Grammond, but then he realizes that they're "moguls," Moslems from China's Far West.

The "moguls" are the first to be led up the steps to kowtow to the emperor. When they're done, it's the Koreans' turn, and then the Van Braams'. The eunuchs are taking special care to clear people away

from the walls, and the Van Braams can see why. There are narrow slots in the paper windows, through which peer feminine eyes.⁵⁹

The emperor is sitting, legs crossed, and they are so close that they can see every wrinkle on his face. To his sides kneel Heshen and another official, who seem to be talking to the emperor about the Van Braams. Heshen rises and tells the translator to inform them, on behalf of the emperor, that in all his majesty's eighty-five years, they're the first Dutchmen who have ever come so close. They kowtow in thanks. The emperor keeps them near him for a long time, so that he and the women can get a good look.

The women aren't the only ones eager to look at the Europeans. The Koreans also take careful note of their hair, their deep-set eyes, "their peculiar hats and clothing, truly a strange sight to behold."⁶⁰ To commemorate meeting them, one Korean pens a poem:

Since the ancient times of Emperor Yao,
emperors and kings have established the empire,
and a great wall runs ten thousand miles,
connecting to the deep blue sea.
Golden palaces reach the high heavens,
rivaling the blue of the skies.
Under the sun, every crack and fissure is illuminated.
Within the great domain, all the small countries
come to the Heavenly Kingdom to pay respect.
From the Western Oceans comes another country,
Holland, which, after a hundred years, once again arrives
to present precious things.⁶¹

It's not every day you get a chance to meet men from one of the "farthest countries in the world."⁶²

During this time, a performance has been taking place on the stage, and eventually attendants lead the envoys down the stairs and seat them on carpets laid on the paving stones. The Van Braams, used to chairs, find it very painful.⁶³ It's also crowded, and they barely fit in the little space between the stage and the emperor's hall.

Small tables are placed in front of each of them, and from the crowded ranks, officials step forth and set down pastries, sweets, and fruit. The emperor sends treats from his own table, including an excellent yellow "jelly" and a cup of "milk expressed from a kind of bean." Everything is done in a way to show the greatest honor to the guests. For instance, the eunuchs who bring the imperial treats don't just hand them to the guests but present them to a high official, who then personally proffers them.

Van Braam is pleased: "I had the distinguished honour of being

waited upon by the Prime Minister of the Chinese Empire, who is also not unfrequently called the Second Emperor.”⁶⁴ When these treats are bestowed, the guests bow their heads in thanks. There isn’t enough room to kowtow.

After the food, the emperor sends little gifts: embroidered purses, bottles of snuff, boxes of tea, blue porcelain bowls, oranges. These little things are much sought after, especially the little silk purses, a special mark of favor. This time, with tables removed, they can perform a proper kowtow.

This is the China that Van Braam has been promised by the missionaries. “The utmost order prevailed, because there were no domestics of the inferior class; and it must be confessed that everything that was served up was cooked very well, and in a very cleanly manner.” He feels—rightly—that he’s been offered an unprecedented opportunity to see the interior of the palace, typically off limits to foreign ambassadors.⁶⁵

Van Braam also enjoys the performances. The play itself doesn’t make much of an impression. Chinese dramas are confusing even to the Koreans, who are highly literate in Chinese but find the singing incomprehensible. A Korean ambassador—not one of the ones at this particular event—noted how embarrassing this can be: “Sometimes the audience would break into thunderous laughter while we, ignorant of the language, just sat there like clay statues.”⁶⁶

But drama is only part of today’s performance. Van Braam is most impressed by a strongman who lies on his back turning a ladder back and forth with his feet while a child climbs up and down, twisting this way and that. After this feat, the man holds up by his feet a huge urn, turning it round and round. Suddenly, the boy appears inside it, kowtows to the emperor, and proceeds to do tricks and feats on top of it.

Much to the relief of the Van Braams’s cramped legs, these entertainments don’t last long. After forty-five minutes, the emperor leaves, and the Van Braams, uncle and nephew, stand up again and return to their lodging, where they boast about having been the first Westerners received in the inner palaces and show off their embroidered imperial pouches. Guignes calls them “ordinary and dirty purses.”⁶⁷

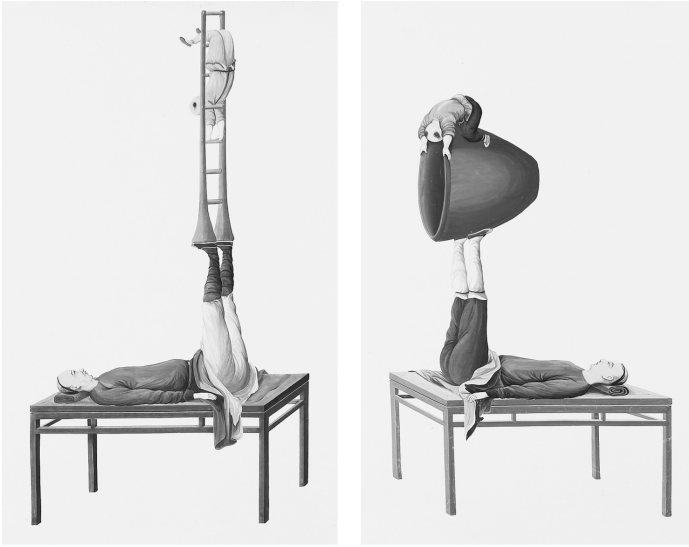


FIGURE 12. A boy with balance. “Balance Extraordinaire, 19 janvier.” These two paintings, probably made by a Chinese artist in Canton after original sketches by A. E. van Braam Houckgeest, depict acrobats who performed in the Forbidden City, Beijing.

Source: Album of Chinese drawings and documents, BR 350, Nos 10 and 11, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Florence, Italy. Reproduced by permission of the Ministero per i beni e le attività culturali e per il turismo / Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Firenze. Reproduction prohibited.

Later, the emperor sends pomegranates, pomelos, and apples, and they're told to get their rest.⁶⁸ The next morning they'll be up early, because it will be New Year's Eve, when the emperor holds a great formal banquet.

CHAPTER TWELVE

A New Year

THE SCREAMER WAKES Titsingh up at half past three, “bringing the entire house into movement with his shrill voice.”¹ Even Guignes and the younger gentlemen, lodged in a separate building, complain: “He yells his head off in such a way that even those of us who aren’t obliged to go to court are woken up and can’t go back to sleep until after he leaves. He always comes two hours too early.”²

Through a bitterly cold wind—their thermometers read sixteen degrees Fahrenheit—the envoys are taken into the Forbidden City. This time they’re led to the huge ceremonial courtyards that run up the spine of the Forbidden City, south to north. The first of these courtyards, just north of the Meridian Gate, is dominated by the Gate of Supreme Harmony, although the term “gate” doesn’t do justice to this massive temple-like structure, which squats, both earthbound and lofty, atop a plateau of white stone balustrades.

Up the stairs they walk, through the building, and then down the other side, where they find themselves in an even larger courtyard, surrounded by buildings fronted by white marble balustrades. On the north side, across from them, rises the Hall of Supreme Harmony, its golden roof decorated with carved figures. They walk up the stairs, pass through the dark, cavernous building, and into another plaza, somehow both grander and more intimate than the previous one.

At the center is a pavilion whose roof ends in a point topped by a small golden sphere. This is the Hall of Central Harmony (中和殿), where the emperor typically rests between ceremonial duties, but it’s shut today, so they can’t see inside.³ Behind it, at the end of the

square, stands the Hall of Preserving Harmony (保和殿), with massive red pillars and a double roof of golden tiles, from which figurines of animals look out over the eaves. In front and to the sides are a large rack of bells, a huge drum, and other ritual instruments. Deep inside the building, a golden throne stands on a gilded platform.

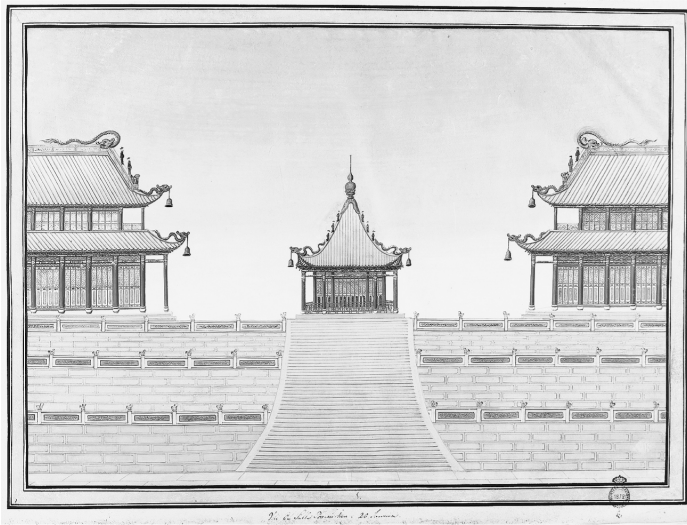


FIGURE 13. The Hall of Central Harmony 中和殿. “Vue du [sic] salle Pau-au-tien, 20 janvier.” This painting, probably by a Chinese artist in Canton, depicts the Hall of Central Harmony, which stands between the Hall of Preserving Harmony 保和殿, where Titsingh and Van Braam participated in a formal banquet, and the Hall of Supreme Harmony 太和殿.

Source: Album of Chinese drawings and documents, BR 350, No. 1, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Florence, Italy. Reproduced by permission of the Ministero per i beni e le attività culturali e per il turismo / Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Firenze. Reproduction prohibited.

This courtyard is clearly where the ceremony will take place, because it's filled with rows of small tables draped with white linen. A large yellow tent has been raised, and there's a colorfully decorated theater. Titsingh and Van Braam are surprised by the disorder. People of all ranks and classes crowd in to look at them. Actors dressed as animals and mythical creatures creep through the crowds and finger the Europeans' clothes.

Titsingh and Van Braam are shown to two tables standing on thick red carpet and watch as other guests sit down on cushions brought by their servants, legs crossed beneath them. They do the same. It's painful to sit this way, but they have so much to look at. “Everything,” writes Van Braam, “that we saw and experienced was for us an entirely new and unique spectacle, which continually held

our attention.”⁴

Just past eight o'clock the music starts, “pleasant and harmonious,” and the emperor makes his entrance.⁵ Everyone stands, drops to their knees, and kowtows. A table is placed in front of the emperor. He eats a few bites, at which attendants remove the cloths covering the guests’ tables.

Titsingh and Van Braam scrutinize the stacks of copper bowls piled before them: four layers of twelve dishes each, with two large bowls on top: fifty in all. They look dirty, and the boiled lamb legs, which stand on the very top, are, Van Braam writes, enough “to disgust a man with mutton for the rest of his days.” There are also cakes, porridges, fruits, sweets, and “hasty puddings.”⁶

It’s a cold day for a picnic, and Titsingh eats nothing, just sits and watches “with amazement” as the other guests eat avidly.⁷ Van Braam samples some fruit, marveling at the difference between today’s meal and the one he had yesterday in the emperor’s private party.

Servants emerge from the yellow tent carrying large golden vats. A cup is presented to the emperor. After he sips, small cups are delivered to each guest, who bow their heads in thanks. Van Braam finds the drink “very agreeable,” similar to the wine of Madeira or the Cape of Good Hope.⁸

After a while, Titsingh and Van Braam are approached by officials, who help them to their feet and guide them by the arms across the polished stone and up the stairs to the gilded throne. To each side stand vases of flowers, whose fragrance mixes with the sandalwood incense that burns in large brass braziers.⁹ The emperor is dressed in a brown silk dragon robe lined with fur from the belly of a black fox.¹⁰ His eyes are watery. His wrinkled cheeks hang in folds. His eyelids droop so much that he has to raise his head and throw it back a little to see them. But he smiles kindly and hands Titsingh a cup of Chinese wine, asking a few questions. Titsingh pretends to sip, answers the questions, and kowtows.

When Van Braam kowtows, his hat falls off, and the emperor laughs. As a high minister bends down and returns the hat, the emperor asks Van Braam if he understands Chinese.

“Poton,” says Van Braam.

This is close enough to the Chinese phrase “I don’t know” to make the emperor laugh more. Van Braam is delighted. “While I drank my cup of wine,” he writes,

[he] looked at me and seemed to think it whimsical that I would make use of his language so apropos to tell him that I did not understand it. I

afterwards finished my salute of honour; and when I rose to retire, the Emperor, having his eyes still turned towards me, kept looking at me with a countenance expressive of the greatest kindness. Thus did I receive a mark of the highest predilection, and such as it is even said no Envoy ever obtained before. I confess that the remembrance of what I had suffered since the morning by remaining so long in the cold, was very much softened by this gracious reception.¹¹

Now the entertainments begin. A mat is spread out, and two wrestlers step forward, dressed in white. The winner kowtows, and another pair comes on. After the wrestling come performances similar to what might be seen at a fair. A group of people on stilts portray horsemen, with colored-paper steeds, harnesses, and helmets.¹² Various groups sing songs—Southeast Asian, Tibetan, “Moorish.” Each group has its own musicians and dresses in its distinctive style.

Titsingh and Van Braam, freezing and aching from sitting on the ground, are unimpressed. Van Braam writes that the emperor “does not ... enjoy the tenth part of the pleasure and amusements which are at the command of the meanest Prince in Europe. His recreations consist of tricks and buffooneries, with which it would be difficult to divert the common people of a European country at a fair.” Still, Van Braam reasons, since the emperor isn’t aware of what he’s missing, “he cannot be said to suffer any privation.”¹³ Titsingh thinks this performance indicates that the Qing are primitive compared to Europeans. “This reception,” Titsingh writes, “further confirmed my new impression concerning this much vaunted nation, which, compared to the Japanese, truly seems to be in a state of infancy.” He finds the entertainments amateurish. “If it had been any common peasant Christmas in Europe,” Titsingh writes, “all these performers would have been chased from the stage with stones.”¹⁴

But what he doesn’t understand is that these performances aren’t meant purely for entertainment. They showcase the rich variety of the Qing empire and are part of a deliberate ruling strategy analogous to the use of four official languages or the adoption of Tibetan religious institutions and Mongol political structures. Banquets like this are programmed with music and performances from Manchus, Mongols, Warkas, Uighurs, Tibetans, and neighboring nationalities, such as Burmese, Vietnamese, Nepalese, and Koreans. These practices are explicitly codified in official manuals and guides.¹⁵ By showcasing the “Music of the Four Directions” the emperor helps “unite the world.”¹⁶

This imperial display is intended at once to aggrandize the Great Qing and to honor the many peoples that make up the empire. The

Qing use the term “Music of the Four Directions” (四方之樂), but they’ve adapted it from a more biased term: “Music of the Four Barbarian Tribes” (四夷之樂), which comes from the ancient text *Rituals of Zhou* (周禮). The Qing have deliberately changed the phrase so that it’s less derogatory. They’ve treated other phrases similarly, carefully removing the term “barbarian” (夷) and using a less demeaning homophone (裔). All peoples are important under heaven. To be sure, the Manchu regime is at the center, and some dances celebrate their own culture and history, such as the dance with the horses on stilts (the *yanglie* dance 楊烈舞), which reenacts the early history of the Manchus, when they were still based in the far north.¹⁷ But the Qing officials take seriously the idea that their empire is made up of many different peoples, each with their own cultural attainments.

Titsingh and Van Braam are only dimly aware that today’s performances are meant to edify, not just entertain. Whereas the Koreans can at least follow along, the Dutchmen just sit, painfully, and are relieved when the emperor leaves and they can stand up again.

They’re surprised at what happens next. “Everything,” Titsingh writes, “went to pieces. Our servants grabbed tobacco, fruit, meat, condiments, etc, and wrapped everything up in a cloth, because it is common here to take away with one everything that was served.”¹⁸ In fact, this is another New Year’s custom. Once the guests have finished, the servants and everyone else are encouraged to “snatch the banquet delicacies” (搶宴).¹⁹

Walking in “a heavy crowd,” they get back to their carts and return to their lodgings, “stiff with cold.”²⁰ The emperor sends some tables full of dishes from the banquet. They give the food to the servants, who are delighted, claiming that each table cost fifty taels of silver (in fact the cost was far less).²¹ They also receive visits from high officials, and Van Braam is happy to hear that the emperor told the grandees of the court about his “poton” incident, and that “poton” has become the talk of the court, “the cant-word of the day.” “Everyone,” he writes, “congratulates me upon my standing so high in the good graces of the Emperor. Although this excessive honour can be of no service to me, I am far from being insensible to such public testimonies of the Emperor of China’s good will towards me.”²²

The officials tell them to be ready early tomorrow for New Year’s Day, when they’ll be invited to another banquet, a more august occasion.

Their sleep on New Year's Eve is disturbed by firecrackers, which start at midnight and go all night long.²³ Not long thereafter, the screamer arrives, and Titsingh and Van Braam quickly dress. He says he's not sure whether the emperor will be holding the usual ceremony, because today there will be an eclipse. He says he'll go to the palace to find out the plans. Titsingh wonders why they couldn't have decided beforehand instead of forcing them out of their warm beds. He's unhappy. The coal is damp, and people keep coming and going, letting in the freezing wind. He and Van Braam try to warm themselves as they wait, "passing the time with sad and frustrated comments."²⁴

Eventually, the screamer returns and says they won't be needed at the palace today. They're "happy to be freed so easily." Back to their beds they go, "to celebrate the new year of the Chinese empire by taking a little more rest."²⁵

Titsingh and Van Braam note in their separate accounts that the Chinese see an eclipse as an omen of catastrophe, and therefore the entire court will pass the day "in mourning" and "superstitious practices."²⁶

In fact, the emperor isn't worried about the eclipse. He writes a poem today: "Heaven Truly Has Granted Generous Favor in Reaching the 60th Year of the Qianlong Reign."²⁷ There is nothing, he writes, that heaven can't do. It can be awe-inspiring, with its wind and thunder and rain, but a wise leader heeds its signs of warning. This eclipse, combined with the lunar eclipse that will occur in fifteen days, was a clear omen, but he's already done what he should. His conscience is clear: "Last winter, I thought deeply over past mistakes and reproached myself openly." He canceled the sixtieth-year celebrations in the hope that the snows and rains would return, and it worked. In the summer, it rained in Beijing more than six days in a row.²⁸ Now he can relax and compose: "In the night, crowds look up to the beauty of the heavens, and happy sounds of fireworks echo through the calm of the first day of the year."²⁹

But this is no ordinary New Year's celebration. Not only is it the beginning of his sixtieth year of reign. It's also, he's decided, his last year of reign. Long ago, he promised that if he were fortunate enough to rule for a full , he would step down. It's time to keep the promise.³⁰ He writes a line: "My heart is willing to act in accordance with first [plans] for the sixtieth year," explaining his meaning in an annotation:

Ever since I ascended to the throne in the bingchen year, I have worked hard to govern each day, arising early and going to bed late. Days and

nights slipped by imperceptibly, and now, to my surprise, a full calendrical cycle has passed. I recall that when I ascended the throne, I burned incense and told Heaven that I wished to rule for sixty years. Now it is near the time when I should pass on my power. How fortunate that I've reached my eighties with a healthy and strong body, so that I can still work hard on the affairs of government, issuing edicts every day, no different from before.... Today I am happy that my original wish has been fulfilled and what I hoped for has come to pass.³¹

Who will take his place?

That's a question people have been afraid to ask for more than a decade and a half, ever since the case of Jin Congshan, a scholar who kneeled in front of Qianlong as he passed on the road and submitted to him an unauthorized memorial. This was a dangerous move, punishable by hard labor or exile. Still more dangerous was the memorial's content. Jin Congshan advised the emperor to name an heir, implying that not doing so defied Chinese tradition.

The emperor was furious, feeling that Jin Congshan was painting him and his clan as barbarians, insufficiently civilized. He sentenced Jin Congshan to death by a thousand cuts and issued an edict saying he had no intention of naming an heir, on the grounds that doing so would only lead to factionalism and instability. He warned his subjects not to believe that he was in any way "covetous of the throne or unwilling to designate a successor."³² He said that his decisions about who would be heir would remain secret and that he intended to keep ruling through his sixtieth year on the throne. Jin Congshan's sentence was changed to beheading, but his ministers got the message: don't mention the succession.³³

New Year's is a good time to announce an heir, and it seems that he reveals his successor at a New Year's banquet given for his family and clan members. Here's how one historian tells the story:

In Qianlong 60s first month's second day, the interior court was decorated festively, brilliant glorious, sparkling, with music gently rising and falling. The eighty-five-year-old Qianlong emperor was giving a banquet for the clan and family members and clansmen and relatives, who had been summoned to pay new years greetings. Seeing that on this grand occasion, the sons and grandsons were filling the halls, he reminisced about the sixty years since he had taken the throne, and all kinds of feelings welled up in his mind. On that day, the eunuchs had brought several large boxes filled with silver ingots for Qianlong to use to give red envelopes to his sons and grandsons. But when the red envelopes were all given out, one son hadn't been given anything. This was his fifteenth son, Yongyan. "Everone's been given red envelopes," he thought. "Why am I the only one left who's received nothing?" Yongyan didn't dare ask the question out

loud, but his face showed surprise, and he remained there looking puzzled, pondering. At this point, Qianlong asked in a quiet, unhurried, and serious voice, “Of what use is silver to you?” As these words were spoken there was an immediate soft exclamation. Everybody understood at once: It wasn’t that Qianlong wasn’t giving him a red envelope. It was that he was giving him all the riches of the Qing empire.³⁴

Was the event really as dramatic as this? It’s hard to know what precisely is happening in the imperial palaces.

In any case, the succession won’t take place until the next New Year’s. For now, the emperor is still in charge, which means carrying out the proper ceremonies. A few days into the new year, he goes out to perform one of the most important rites in the calendar: the Prayer for Good Harvests.³⁵

This ritual is carried out during the first month of each year at the Temple of Heaven complex, according to an ancient and detailed protocol.³⁶ Ever since he was seventy years old, he’s had trouble walking, and the ceremony typically requires a walk of nearly half a mile, from the southern part of the Temple of Heaven to the Altar of Heaven in the north. So the ministers of the Board of Rites determined that a special door could be built near the Altar of Heaven to save him the walk. He calls it the Seventy-Year Door (古稀門), to clarify that none of his sons or successors may pass through it until they turn seventy. There should be no laziness when it comes to rituals. Still, there have been times when he was too sick even to use the door, so he sent a son instead.³⁷ This year, he goes himself, and in an unusual gesture, the Dutch are invited to greet him as he proceeds on this most sacred errand for the last time.

The greeting takes place outside in the great Meridian Gate Plaza, just south of the Forbidden City.³⁸ It’s too dark to see anything, and bitter cold, so Titsingh and Van Braam, irritated to be awoken so early, are led into a little room to wait, but someone gets out of bed and stares at them, rubbing his eyes in the lamplight.³⁹ They’re quickly taken to another room to wait, and when it becomes light, they’re led back into the square. Titsingh finds it beautiful, with broad flat paving stones and an imperial way running north and south, raised up a few inches above the rest of the surface.⁴⁰ They wait next to some Koreans, “amidst a crowd of insolent onlookers,” until an hour later, at half past seven, the emperor’s train comes through from the north.⁴¹

Now, finally, they witness the kind of spectacle imperial China is famous for. This is one of the great rituals, marshalling all the meticulous pomp of the Board of Rites. First through the Meridian

Gate are more than a thousand attendants, many mounted on horses. Most of them are carrying something for the ceremony: a yellow folding chair, a low table, great golden vases, boxes of betel, huge dishes, golden boxes of perfumes. When the emperor himself appears, he's carried by thirty-two men in a huge chair that looks like an altar.

This all reminds Van Braam of the Hebrew Bible: "In this ceremony the Emperor has some resemblance to the High Priest of the Jews, who entered once a year, dressed with the greatest magnificence, into the Holy of Holies, there to offer an expiatory sacrifice in the name of the whole Hebrew nation."⁴²

Scholars in Europe have argued that the Chinese preserve the oldest forms of human civilization, their language "the primitive language spoken through the whole world before the confusion of Babel."⁴³ The missionaries have been keen to emphasize China's antiquity, while others—such as Guignes's father—are skeptical. But here, to Van Braam, is a vision of humanity's earliest customs.

The envoys kneel in the road, and the emperor inclines his head and gives them a kind look as he passes. They bow but don't kowtow as his train passes through the huge red building that is the Duanmen Gate. The emperor's day is just beginning. He'll spend it in fasting so that he's purified for the prayers.

Titsingh and van Braam are relieved to go back to their lodge and are happily surprised when, not long after they get back, a gift arrives from the imperial court: food from the emperor's own table. But when Titsingh looks at it, he feels disgust:

It's impossible to imagine anything like this. Carved off chunks that, among us, would be thrown to the dogs, a few little cakes of white dough boiled in water, and some Chinese banquet prepared with pork lard—These were the choice morsels designed for our delectation, before which we were obliged to make a compliment. The mandarins who brought it to us threw this and that onto a wooden table in the anteroom. We gave it over to our servants, who greedily grabbed it and prized it greatly.⁴⁴

Van Braam agrees that the food is an odd gift:

The meat consisted of a bit of the ribs, upon which there was hardly the thickness of half an inch of lean flesh; a small bone of the shoulder with scarcely any meat upon it at all; and four or five other bones belonging to the back or feet of a sheep, and appearing to have been already gnawed. All this disgusting collection was upon a dirty dish, and seemed rather fitting for the meal of a dog than the repast of a man. In Holland, the worst of beggars would receive a more cleanly pittance at an hospital; and yet it is a mark of honour shewn by an Emperor to an Ambassador!

Perhaps it was even the leavings of the Monarch, and in that case, according to the opinion of the Chinese, it was the greatest favour that could be conferred, since we had it in our power to gnaw the bone that his Majesty had begun to clean.⁴⁵

Van Braam suspects that the emperor himself may not be aware of these “disgusting proceedings” and blames the stewards for not making sure that the emperor’s gifts look better. On the other hand, he notes that the people of China pay little attention to cleanliness: “When there is any want of plates or dishes they do nothing but turn to those that have been already used, in order to throw the remnants upon the first table that comes to hand, without troubling themselves about its being clean or dirty. Such is the politeness of the officers of a court where one of the most important tribunals is that of ceremonies.”⁴⁶ Guignes suspects that the fault lies with the officials designated to take care of the Europeans. Instead of doing so, they instead “examine everything that is destined for us, take that which appears good to them, and replace it with scraps from their tables, because it’s impossible to believe that the Emperor might provide such miserable gifts as those that are being brought to us on his behalf.”⁴⁷

The emperor returns from the Temple of Heaven early the following day, and once again Titsingh and Van Braam greet him in the square, but this time there’s no smile. The imperial palanquin is closed.⁴⁸

The ambassadors, duty done, return to bed. They’ve been up since three in the morning. Van Braam hates all this early rising, to which he submits with “extreme repugnance.” He does observe that early audiences might be good for European courts to emulate: “It would be not a little irksome to European courtiers if the princes there adopted the custom of giving their audience ... at the break of day. It is probable that their levees would not be so much crowded as at present, and that the same display of luxury would not be seen on the part of those who only go that they may be able to say they have appeared at court.”⁴⁹ The worst part is the cold: “How hard is it in winter, and in the middle of the night, when the cold is severe and piercing, to leave a warm bed to go and encounter the inclemency of the air.”⁵⁰

But the emperor and his courtiers seem to really like the Dutch and invite them to many events during this busy holiday season. He and Titsingh will be getting up early a lot.⁵¹

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

The Purple Ray Pavilion, A Good Death, A Tour of Temples

THEIR NEXT EARLY MORNING event is a ceremony dear to the heart of the Qianlong emperor: the annual banquet at the Purple Ray Pavilion (紫光閣). This building, located in the imperial park, west of the Forbidden City, is a shrine to the emperor's glory, its walls festooned with paintings and poems commemorating the Ten Perfect Military Victories (十全武功) that he considers among his greatest achievements, because they doubled the size of the Qing empire. Each year, during the first lunar month, he holds a banquet here in remembrance, attended by peoples from throughout the Great Qing and beyond.

This year, he's keen to have the Dutch there, so by four in the morning, Titsingh and Van Braam are gamely bumping through the imperial gardens in little carts. Just on the other side of the Rainbow Bridge, they stop at a large gate, whose colorful wooden doors admit them into a courtyard planted with tall cedars.¹ A walk under the trees takes them, after a few stops, to the Purple Ray Pavilion. Van Braam sketches its red pillars, its two-storied golden-tiled roof, and the figurines adorning the eaves. He finds it a "magnificent building."² The view from here is lovely, too: In the distance, the pre-

dawn light reveals the White Pagoda on its hill, and through the trees they see skaters on the frozen lake.

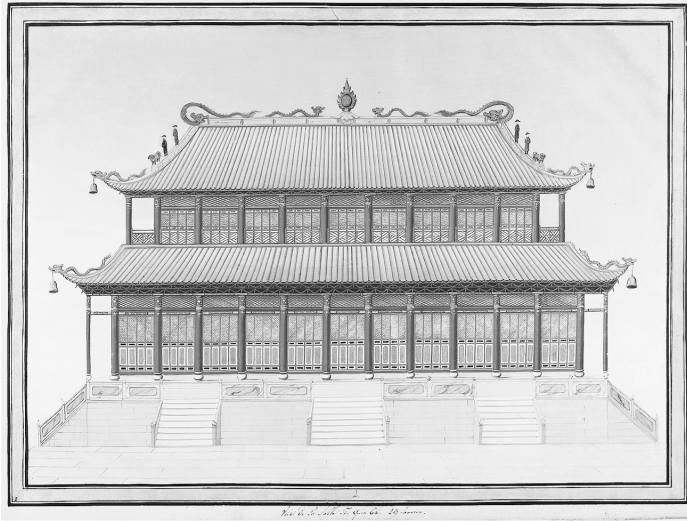


FIGURE 14. The Purple Ray Pavilion. “Vue de la salle Tze Quon Cok, 29 janvier.” This painting, by a Canton artist commissioned by A. E. van Braam Houckgeest, shows the Purple Ray Pavilion (紫光閣), where Titsingh and Van Braam participated in a banquet.
Source: Album of Chinese drawings and documents, BR 350, no. 2, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Florence, Italy. Reproduced by permission of the Ministero per i beni e le attività culturali e per il turismo / Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Firenze. Reproduction prohibited.

The pavilion is ready for the feast, with low tables arranged in rows, racks of bells and drums, and a great golden tent sheltering tables of gifts. Behind it, just out of sight, workers are busy carrying heavy barrels suspended from poles, tending fires to keep the food and drink warm, counting and stacking bowls and plates, scooping rice and ladling broth. They are placing the dishes on low, red tables, so that the tables are ready to carry out and be palced in neat rows for the guests.³

His imperial majesty arrives just as the sun rises, carried in a yellow palanquin by eight bearers, who take him all the way up the pavilion stairs. As he sits on his gilded throne, music plays, and the guests take their cushions. The Dutch are next to him, just to his left, and Titsingh is happy to see that he and Van Braam each have their own table, whereas the other guests—including the Koreans—sit two to a table.⁴

The meal is simpler than that of the New Year’s Eve banquet—four dishes instead of fifty—but better, and Van Braam is especially

taken with a special dish sent by the emperor from his own table: a cup of soup with balls of dough that seems to have brown sugar inside.⁵ The emperor also gives the Dutch and other guests cups of wine, inviting them up to his throne for a short conversation.

Each year the emperor pens a poem about the event, and this year he describes how representatives of the Dutch king have sent a special ambassador to the capital, with gifts and letters, to congratulate him. He expresses his gratification at Titsingh's willingness to move so quickly through the provinces to arrive in the capital before the end of the lunar year. He has, he writes, soft feelings of cherishing for these guests from afar. Their presence here is another sign that all is well: "The croplands have good, thick snow, accumulating abundantly, which hasn't melted due to the late spring. China and the foreign countries are in splendid harmony and sincere peace, a prosperous time."⁶

As they eat, a fat man sings in the purest baritone Van Braam has ever heard, better even than the three famous Jewish brothers he heard in Amsterdam twenty-five years ago.⁷ There are performances by Mongols, Tibetans, and Islamic peoples from the Far West. Titsingh hates the music, especially that of the Moslems, "with their wretched singing and beating on little drums."⁸

Fortunately for him, the party doesn't last long. The emperor soon departs through a doorway behind his throne. The Dutch and other guests are led the other way, down to a yellow tent full of presents. The lamas, in their golden robes, are first, and then Mongols, Moslems, Koreans, and Dutch. Titsingh gets twenty rolls of silk, Van Braam eight. Nor does the emperor forget the other members of Titsingh's party. Eight rolls are to be given to each of the other gentlemen, including Guignes, while the soldiers and servants will each receive two pieces of silk and two swathes of brown linen.

There's also a scepter for the Prince of Orange. Van Braam and Titsingh are impressed by the fine carving of the jade, and they're told that it's worth 2,000 silver dollars.⁹ But when Guignes later sees it, he says it's just ordinary agate and not worth much.¹⁰ Right around the time the emperor gives this gift, he writes a poem, "Paeon to the Sandalwood Scepter" (詠檀玉如意), describing the ancient pedigree of these treasures, and how "the old jade is ... carved in the shape of a taotie monster, which adorns the scepter to warn against greed."¹¹

There's a lot of poetry writing during the New Year's celebrations, and the emperor is headed now to a special tea and poetry party, held annually at the Chonghua Palace on an auspicious day in the first lunar month. Only select officials are invited, usually just

eighteen. Sitting in rows, each person writes four lines on a topic suggested by the emperor, the emperor providing the first two lines. It's an ancient practice, dating back to the Tang dynasty. Qianlong adores poetry and plays an active role, reading the poems out loud and bestowing prizes, including paintings and scrolls written in his own hand.

Today's topic is death, something the emperor has been thinking about a lot. For the past several years, he's asked his guests to ruminate on the Five Blessings from the Classic of History, and they've made their way through the first four: longevity, wealth, health, and love of virtue.¹² This year they take on the last: a peaceful death in old age.

As the verses are hung on the walls, he reflects on the length of his rule, and his decision to abdicate at the end of this year:

Grandfather came to the throne at the age of eight, and I, in the fifty-third year of the calendrical cycle, ascended the throne at the age of twenty-five. Now I've undeservedly received the favor of heaven and happily witness the start of another fifty-third cyclical year, [sixty years later], the days and months stretching out long, the people well off and prosperous. Thus, the verses that hang on the walls in the Chonghua Palace [on the subject of a peaceful death] are appropriate, perfect, and complete. An old man, [I'm] ashamed to have obtained the Ten Great Victories. "Ashamed"—this word is heartfelt and sincere. Now I [prepare to] abdicate my throne, not to my brothers but to my son, ... and this is not like previous examples [of abdication] in history, which were compelled [by circumstance]. Instead we all celebrate together in auspiciousness.¹³

He goes on to find cosmic blessing in numerical coincidences, and then, in comments, writes that when he first ascended the throne, he vowed that he wouldn't dare surpass his grandfather's long reign. He loved his grandfather, the great Kangxi emperor, who famously ruled for sixty-one years, one of the longest reigns in imperial history. "When I first ascended the throne, I vowed that I wouldn't dare match grandfather's sixty-one years of rein and that, upon reaching sixty years [on the throne] I must pass on my authority. Counting up grandfather's and grandson's reigns together, they've already surpassed in reign time a hundred and twenty years, and that's certainly an auspicious thing, never before been seen in the history of emperors and kings."¹⁴

The emperor expresses his thanks for so many good omens, such as the good thick snow on the croplands, which is still accumulating, and for the arrival of the Dutch ambassadors, because when China and foreign lands sincerely come together in peace and splendor, it is

truly a great and auspicious event.¹⁵

As a sign of his pleasure with the Dutch, he grants another unprecedented honor: a tour of temples and pavilions in the imperial gardens off limits to most foreign guests. The Korean ambassadors, who have the closest relationship with China of any foreign country, have prided themselves on the belief that they are the only foreigners allowed to see such places.¹⁶ But today, a Korean envoy writes, “the emperor ordered A Gui, Fuchang’an, and others to take our country’s two envoy ministers and also the Dutch envoy ministers for a tour around the Eternal Peace Temple, Five Dragon Pavilions, and all the other beautiful places, which is something that has never before happened, an unprecedented mark of imperial favor.”¹⁷

So the Dutch and Koreans are taken back over the Rainbow Bridge and to Jade Flower Island, where they visit Eternal Peace Temple, a Buddhist Temple in Tibetan style. This is the temple with the white bulbous structure on top that the travelers have noted: the White Pagoda. The monks are friendly and lead them in, showing them the colossal gilded statue of a fat Buddha, his countenance “expressing pleasure and gaiety, the characteristics of the idol of sensuality among the Chinese.”¹⁸ Afterward, they walk through the passageway in the back and climb to the top of the hill—Van Braam counts 120 stairs.

The White Pagoda rises above them, but their attention is drawn to what they see below: a fog-cloaked Beijing with “an infinite number of edifices and buildings of all kinds.”¹⁹ The sight is startling, and Van Braam feels it is nearly impossible to do justice to the vastness of it.²⁰ In the foreground lies the frozen lake and Rainbow Bridge. Beyond stands the palace itself, with its many plazas and courtyards, its gates, pavilions, and colorful roofs. Amid this “immense space,” they manage to pick out their lodging, surprised to discover that it stands within the outer walls of the palace zone.²¹ To the left, their guides point out a hill rising behind the main palace walls: Jing Mountain, where the last emperor of the Chinese race hanged himself.²² Koreans remember this event with sadness, because the Manchus who rule China today twice invaded their homeland, and secretly the Koreans still use the old Ming calendar for internal record keeping, although they use the Qing one when dealing with the Qing. The Koreans also don’t wear the Qing haircut or Qing-style robes, and so they recall to many Chinese the old Ming dynasty, which sometimes leads to interesting conversations. Today, their relations with the Qing are much better, but they still harbor nostalgia for the old order.²³

After admiring the White Pagoda and its many-armed icon, they

walk down uneven steps to the lake shore, where sleighs take them across to the Five Dragon Pavilions (五龍亭), gazebos designated for the emperor and his consorts to fish and picnic in the summer. After admiring the richly ornamented roofs, the exquisite gilding and varnishing, the Dutchmen are taken to the “Temple of Ten Thousand Icons (萬佛樓),” whose walls are filled with niches about a foot high, each displaying a small golden statue. An artificial waterfall runs in rivulets around these niches.²⁴ Next on the itinerary is a short sleigh ride to the Taisu Temple (太素殿), which houses a thirty-five-foot high statue with six heads and hundreds of arms. In front stand two bronze towers, each fifteen feet high, with all kinds of images, including, on one of them, depictions of “both sexes in an indecent posture.”²⁵ Titsingh is impressed: “Both of the towers were extraordinarily well-made and deserve to be considered works of art.”²⁶

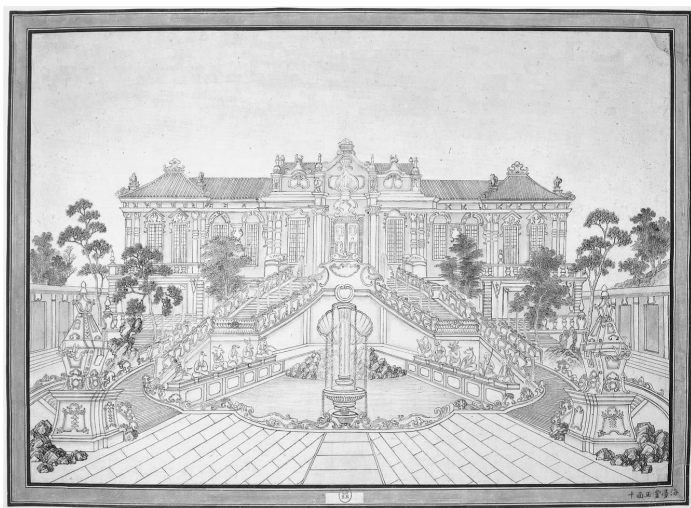


FIGURE 15. European palace in Yuanmingyuan. “View of Placid Lake Hall” (海晏堂), one of the French-style baroque palaces designed by Jesuit missionaries for the Qianlong Emperor that were built in Yuanming Gardens. This is one of nineteen paintings that Van Braam commissioned from a Chinese artist in Canton. They are copies of a special edition of prints commissioned by Qianlong in the 1780s. Unknown Canton-based artist, after print by court artist Yi Lantai.

Source: “Vues de l’une des maisons de plaisances de l’Empereur de la Chine, à Yuen-ming-Yuen, construites dans le goût européen : [dessin] / [dessinées par des peintres chinois d’après les peintures originales des missionnaires jésuites], 1794,” Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Département des Estampes et de la Photographie, PET FOL-OE-18. Public domain.

Notes: A note in the prefatory material of this set reads: “Ces dessins ont été copiés par des peintres chinois sur les peintures originales exécutées par les missionnaires eux-mêmes à la demande et aux frais de Mr Van Braam Houckgeest, chef de la nation hollandaise à Canton en 1794.” The original plates can be viewed in various collections, including Great Britain’s

After the tour, they're returned to their lodgings, "very content to have spent such a pleasant morning." Titsingh writes, "all of this greatly exceeded what I had been shown of this sort of style in Sakai or Nagasaki."²⁷ Van Braam is also enthusiastic, and not just because of the art objects themselves. He loves how everything is arranged:

All the avenues which lead to these edifices; and all the intervals between them, are laid out with exquisite taste. Sometimes we met with a rock, sometimes with places full of stones and pebbles, and all these irregularities united, imitating those of nature with an art which no other nation can equal.... We were abundantly convinced this morning, by the sight of so many curious things, that this country has formerly produced geniuses and great artists, even were it to be supposed that there are none alive at the present day.²⁸

This is when their feelings about China and their treatment begin to change, becoming more positive. To this point, they have felt misused and bitter about the harrowing journey. But now, back in their lodgings, they begin to understand that they're being treated unusually well: "Nowhere, in any of the histories, can one find evidence that such favors have been offered to any former ambassador."²⁹

And this is just the start. Tomorrow they'll accompany the emperor to his main abode: the vast complex of parks and palaces known as Yuanmingyuan (圓明園). Van Braam has twenty drawings of it that depict European palaces like Versailles, with fountains and formal gardens.³⁰ Titsingh is excited to see them in real life: "Everything," he writes, "including the gardens, lanes, pavilions, ponds, etc, has something exquisite about it, which has no like anywhere else in the Indies."³¹

He fantasizes with the others about the luxuries they'll soon enjoy, "tickling our imaginations by trading thoughts of creature comforts for which everyone equally expressed eager longing."³² They're confident "that all of the grief of our imprisonment in Beijing will soon be ameliorated."³³

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Stately Pleasure Gardens

YUANMINGYUAN

THE EMPEROR LOVES YUANMINGYUAN, especially during the New Year's celebrations, when the gardens and palaces are enlivened by fairs and fireworks. The gentlemen go out early to watch him depart Beijing, kneeling on a road strewn with imperial yellow sand.¹ His train is massive, filled with exquisite palanquins bearing mysterious passengers—princes and princesses, dukes and earls. Common carts carry eunuchs crammed together and exposed to the freezing wind. Horses and mules bear men in military and civilian clothes. The emperor greets the visitors from his heated palanquin.²

The gentlemen themselves depart in the afternoon, after some disputes about baggage and carts.³ Yuanmingyuan lies a half-day north of the Forbidden City, and they follow the emperor's route, crossing the Rainbow Bridge and exiting the imperial park via the Xi'an Gate, which disgorges them onto a broad, dusty street.⁴ They pay close attention to this part of Beijing, which they call the "Tartar City," or Inner City. This district is restricted to bannermen and their families, many of whom are descendants of the original conquerors who came to China in the seventeenth century.

In many ways, it's similar to the Outer City. Workers bustle about, dressed in sheepskin clothes and hats, stirring up dust. Tall signs hang on storefronts: red, blue, and white, with huge golden characters. Guignes finds the storefronts irregular and the shops poor

and sloppy, especially the carpenters' shops, which have large piles of wood at their doors.⁵ There are tarps over the wares, to protect them from the dust, and the best items are kept inside. Guignes wonders whether the shops in the cross streets might be better, but it's hard to see through the wooden gates. Access from neighborhood to neighborhood is strictly controlled. The buildings he glimpses through the grills seem just as run down, but the other travelers have more positive impressions, enjoying the bridges with balustrades of white marble, the colorful ceremonial gateways, and the wells with troughs for animals.⁶

One thing is different in the Inner City. To this point, the travelers have glimpsed women only through screens or windows, but in the Manchu City, women move about freely, with normal-sized feet and flowers in their hair. As Guignes writes, "they let themselves be seen voluntarily."⁷ Van Braam becomes quite interested in a group traveling in a cart:

I thought I perceived that many of these young ladies were upon an amorous pilgrimage: in the first place, because they had an old duenna sitting at the fore part of the cart, and also because at the moment our carriages were passing one another, they suffered themselves to be looked at with a freedom equal to the curiosity with which they gazed upon us. They even lifted up entirely the curtain in the front of their carriage, and as married women would never dare to allow themselves such liberties, I am the more strongly confirmed in my opinion.⁸

The travelers miss the company of women and grumble about the kind of society that keeps them segregated. Isn't it a mark of civilization that women and men should mix? Doesn't the fairer sex serve as a civilizing influence? On the pilgrimage to the Japanese capital, Titsingh was able to visit brothels and teahouses. Not here.

It wasn't always this way. When Nieuhof visited China a century and a half ago, he and his comrades interacted a good deal with women. In the city of Nanjing, for instance, as they rode past a gateway of the old imperial court, a Manchu noble lady invited them inside. "She was very debonair and free," Nieuhof writes,

and looked upon our swords and much admired their bending without breaking. She took the embassadour's hat and put it on her own head and unbuttoned his doublet almost down to his waist. Afterward she led the way into the house and desired him to follow, appointing one of her attendants to conduct him, who brought us into her apartment, where we found her standing with her daughter about half her age, waiting our coming in great state.... They drank to us several times in their liquor

made of beans, which is very strong.... They set before us also some of their sweet-meats, much entreating us to eat, excusing the meanness of the entertainment, her husband being absent.⁹

In those days, women had more freedom to mix, especially Manchu women.

Elephant poo. That's the source of a stiffener that noble Manchu women use to style their hair high and rigid. But where do they get the elephants?¹⁰ They are sent as gifts from the south and southwest, often accompanying emissaries. As our European travelers near the outer walls, they encounter a train of pachiderms draped in yellow, their long tusks crossing in front of them. Each has a driver on its shoulders, dressed in red. They are presents for the emperor.¹¹ Most likely they'll be taken to join the elephants who live in the imperial elephant grounds in the southwest Inner City, just inside the Xuanwu Gate. Elephants are a treasured attraction of Beijing, a hallmark of imperial pageantry. That their dung can be used to make a hair product is an added benefit.

The party leaves the elephants behind and passes out of Beijing via the northwest gate.¹² The road narrows, crowded by hawkers' stalls. Proper shops rise behind, their facades "ornamented with exquisite carved work, resplendent with gilding of the richest kind."¹³ As the road winds into the countryside, the shops and stalls give way to gardens and fields, trees, and graves, but the road remains busy, bustling with carts, horses, mules, palanquins, and laborers with burdens on their back.

After fifty minutes or so, they reach their destination: a village Titsingh calls Hoeylang,¹⁴ Van Braam calls Uoitime, Guignes calls Louau-hou-tong, and an anonymous Chinese account calls, in French transliteration, Laou Hou Tong.¹⁵ The precise location of this place isn't clear, but it's almost certainly somewhere in the district of Haidian (海淀), the settlement that lies just south of the palace complex.¹⁶

Unfortunately, the lodging they're brought to is no European-style palace. It's a traditional Chinese-style court-house complex, and the dirt and dust suggest that it has stood empty for a long time. Guignes complains that "all their preparation was limited to putting paper on the windows, extending some rude rugs on the platforms, and placing two or three chairs and a table in each room."¹⁷ But Titsingh isn't too disappointed. The place is large and spacious. He's told that it once belonged to a grand official who fell into disgrace. It's also secluded, so he won't be as exposed to "the press of curious onlookers."¹⁸ Most importantly, it seems that they won't be continually watched as they

were in Beijing. What a relief and a pleasure, he writes, to be here, “away from our overseers [Arguses], and entirely free.”¹⁹

They’re told to rest up, because they’ll be leaving early the next day. “It appears,” grumbles Van Braam, “that we shall be no more exempt here than at Peking from those ceremonies which precede the dawn of day.”²⁰

Sure enough, Van Braam and Titsingh find themselves climbing into little carts at four in the morning, buffeted by the dark wind. Guignes and the other younger gentlemen want to come, too. They ask one of the officials if that’s possible, and he replies they should get ready just in case, but Guignes is sceptical. “We had gotten to know them well, and so we stayed in bed, quite sure that no one would come get us, which is precisely what happened.”²¹

While Guignes sleeps, Van Braam gets dumped into a canal, because his driver can’t see in the dark. Fortunately, the ice is thick and Van Braam isn’t hurt, much to the relief of his escorts, because, he writes, “if any of us should accidentally lose his life, the consequences of that event would be such as to endanger their own.”²² The driver is replaced.

It takes an hour to get to Yuanmingyuan, which they enter through a back gate. In the morning twilight, they admire the winding tree-lined road that takes them to a lovely, flat meadow that’s teeming with carts and horses and people. This is the drilling field, which is used for outdoor events like shooting competitions and fireworks displays. Today’s event is the annual Mongolian banquet, which, as the emperor writes on one of his favorite paintings of this place, is an occasion for the virtue of the sovereign to ritually order distinguished guests from afar: “within and without, all connecting as one family.”²³

The Dutch are taken to a place near a colorful fence, from which they observe the scene. On one side of the field, a huge domed tent shelters a golden throne, in front of which stand racks of instruments like the ones by the ceremonial halls in the Forbidden City. In front, a large yellow canopy stretches over rows of little tables, which eunuchs and servants are setting with trays and cups. Some distance away stands a grand building. The emperor loves the view from there, and his calligraphy graces the facade: Mountain High, Water Wide (山高水長). On one of his favorite paintings of this area, he wrote, in his younger days, the following lines:

In the southwest corner of the [Yuanming] garden, where the ground is flat and low, there are large buildings with many pillars. When one goes there and looks down from the height, the distant hills pile up like hair

buns, and in the foreground the landscape is like an interlaced embroidery, conveying an appearance of vast openness.²⁴

Not far from the building are little sheds containing fireworks, which will be fired off during the Lantern Festival, in a few days.

Groups of musicians gather, each wearing traditional clothing: Chinese, Manchu, Mongol, Moslem. Actors prepare for performances. As the emperor writes in his allusive style, this is a place for performing “Fish into Dragons and Crashing Horns,” by which he means traditional plays and performances.²⁵ More and more guests are arriving as well: great ministers, imperial princes, dukes, noblemen called beiles and beises, and envoys from all over the empire and beyond, including the Koreans in their old fashioned attire.

The Dutch are the most exotic guests of all. Backed up against the fence, they’re besieged by “an irritating press of crowds,” who are eager to see their strange tight clothing and big curly hair.²⁶ It’s a relief when the emperor’s golden palanquin arrives.

Its bearers—four men in official robes and gold buttons—set it down in front of the imperial tent, and the emperor climbs up the dias and sits in the throne. Everyone kowtows.

Titsingh and Van Braam sit down on painful cushions beneath the yellow awning and examine the fifty dishes, which seem as unappetizing as the ones from New Year’s Eve. They eat a bit of fruit and watch the other guests “fall to with a great deal of eagerness and appetite.” After some chewing and swallowing, there is the requisite approach to the emperor’s throne, the kowtow (no hats fall this time), the proffering of a cup of wine, a kind question from the emperor (“are you not cold?”), and then music, acrobatics, wrestling, and—a little distance away—the plays.

These entertainments all seem to be going on at once, which causes Van Braam “a confusion that soon fatigued the mind and banished every idea of amusement.”²⁷ The linguistic and cultural barriers are formidable. “None of this,” he writes, “meant anything to me.”²⁸ Eventually, much to the Europeans’ relief, Moslem players end the ceremony “with their irritating dance,” and the emperor rises from his chair and leaves.²⁹

But as the other guests depart, the Dutch are held back and then led behind the imperial tent to a wide canal, where two sleighs stand under bare-branched trees. They wait, uncertain, until Heshen and the Nan-san-da-yin arrive and greet them in an “extremely friendly” manner. Heshen indicates that they should climb into one of the sleighs. He climbs into the other.

What happens next is extraordinary. The Dutch are treated to an intimate tour of “forbidden ground”: the personal residence of the emperor and his consorts and close family members, which lies in the part of the garden known as the Nine Continents (九州).³⁰

The Nine Continents are islets arranged in a circle around a lake, but so narrow are the waters separating them, and so “serpentine” are the canals, that the envoys become disoriented. As Van Braam writes, “with what pleasure would I have sacrificed a sum of money to obtain a plan, and a dozen of the most interesting views of this magnificent summer palace.”³¹ We can surmise some of the places they go, but it’s an inexact and difficult process, because the envoys don’t use Chinese characters for the place names. Making the process even more fraught is that the gardens are intentionally built in such a way as to make small distances seem vast and long distances intimate. Paths and waterways wind and wend, offering sudden views and dramatic vistas. It’s art to seduce the senses.

The sleighs follow canals for a long time before stopping in front of a dark building. This island is Tantan Dangdang (坦坦蕩蕩), although they’re unaware that they’ve disembarked on an island at all. The Nan-san-da-yin leads them through various small rooms, “all decorated in the Chinese style, with various types of colored paper and nice little items,” and then through a low doorway, beyond which is the main attraction: a deep, rectangular pool.³² The water isn’t frozen, and the minister points to a school of the largest goldfish Van Braam has ever seen, the smallest is a foot-and-a-half long.³³

Titsingh is delighted. “They’re fed on roasted rice,” he writes, “and dart about as happy as if it were summer.”³⁴ But how does he know they’re happy? Can anyone really know the happiness of fish? This is the very question that’s inspired this pond and its nearby viewing platform, the “Know-the-fish Gazebo” (知魚亭), which refers to a famous philosophical story.

Once upon a time, the philosopher Zhuangzi was crossing a bridge with his friend Huizi. Zhuangzi pointed at the water and said, “Look at those fish leaping and darting about so freely and easily. That is the happiness of fish.”

“You’re not a fish,” Huizi replied. “Whence do *you* know the happiness of fish?”

“Well, you aren’t me,” said Zhuangzi. “Whence do you know that I *don’t* know the happiness of fish?”

“Aha,” said Huizi. “You say that I can’t know what you know, since I’m not you. Thus, it follows that *you*, not being a fish, can’t know the happiness of fish. The argument is complete.”

“But wait,” said Zhuangzi. “Let’s go back to the original question.

What you asked me was, ‘Whence do you know the happiness of fish?’ Asking in this way, you presupposed that I *do* know the happiness of fish. And from whence? From up here, above the river.”³⁵

This Daoist logic, in which Zhuangzi both questions and affirms the grounds of knowledge of others’ subjective experience, delighted the emperor, who wrote a poem about this pond:

[At] the chiseled pond, watching the happiness of fish
Open and expansive, free and easy
Floating, swimming, together content
How is it that one must think of the untamed reaches (江湖)
And laugh at the crazy words of Zhuangzi in the land of Meng?
You and I debating right and wrong
The question posed—how to answer it?
The happiness of fish?
The fish themselves know.³⁶

In a prose colophon, he adds, “I know the happiness of fish. I gaze into the distance and worry about the people.”³⁷

Titsingh and Van Braam are unaware of the philosophical inspirations of this pool or the emperor’s delightful poem, but they appreciate this place, so lovely even in the winter, when the freezing wind hisses through the barren trees. As they walk through the nearby buildings, they take note of the books, the valuable curiosities, and the sparse but lovely furnishings—a sofa in each for the emperor, a few stools, but no chairs. There are also some clever old-fashioned European clocks. One is decorated with figures of a man and a woman, whose eyes follow the pendulum.

From here a tree-lined path takes them, after a fifteen-minute walk, to a “vast and magnificent palace.” This, it seems, is part of the emperor’s own residence.³⁸ The buildings are festooned with red lanterns for New Year’s.

The envoys walk through various rooms and courts and arrive at a hall that contains an imperial throne on a pedestal. To the left is the coach that Lord Macartney presented to the emperor, a beautiful vehicle, meticulously painted and varnished. The reins are covered in paper.³⁹ Across from it stands a Chinese wagon, with “four wheels of equal height, very clumsy, painted green all over, and in every respect resembling the wagons used in Holland for the purpose of carrying manure.”⁴⁰ Van Braam wonders about the juxtaposition. “My imagination became much occupied by the question of whether the two were placed here on purpose, as a critique, to demonstrate the

utility of the one vehicle in contrast with the useless superfluity of the other.”⁴¹ But he learns that there’s no such intent. The green carriage is a revered ceremonial vehicle, used each year when the emperor pays homage to agriculture in the Temple of the Earth.

From here the envoys are brought into another complex, where they gain an intimate glimpse of the emperor’s private life: the southernmost of the nine continents, the islet known as Jiuzhou Qingyan (九州清晏), a complex of apartments where the emperor and the imperial ladies live.⁴² Titsingh and Van Braam themselves don’t notice that the ladies are in fact present, secretly peering through latticed windows. They only learn this later, from their servants.⁴³

Everything here is beautiful, but the loveliest of all is the emperor’s own favorite room, which has a picture window with a stunning view. “Nothing,” writes Van Braam, “can equal the prospect that the emperor may enjoy when, sitting in his arm-chair, he turns his eyes towards a large window consisting of a single pane of glass.”⁴⁴ The lake starts at the window itself and stretches out, filled with interconnected islets, whose wooded surfaces are filled with towers, temples, pavilions, and gazebos. Bridges of stone and wood run between them.⁴⁵ On the other side of the lake a range of mountains is crowned by two towers, and farther to the left rises an artificial mountain that must, Van Braam estimates, have cost a fortune to build, because the rocks and stones aren’t found locally. “This work,” he writes, “seems to represent the enterprise of the giants who attempted to scale the Heavens.” All these elements come together to “afford a view of which the pen can give no adequate idea. It is not then without reason that this cabinet is the favourite apartment of the aged Monarch.”⁴⁶ Titsingh, too, falls under its spell. “Never,” he writes, “had I seen, either in reality or in pictures, a more delightful place.”⁴⁷

They’re told that no Westerner has ever set foot in these rooms before, and it seems that this is true. The British only saw small parts of Yuanmingyuan, primarily the more public areas near the main gate in the south. John Barrow, personal secretary to Lord Macartney, stayed in Yuanmingyuan, but his quarters, located near the Great Audience Hall, were run down, and neither he nor any other member of the Macartney mission had a chance to see this or other beautiful parts of the gardens.⁴⁸

Missionaries have seen parts of Yuanmingyuan, most notably the French Jesuit Jean-Denis Attiret, who arrived in the imperial court in 1738 and spent nearly thirty years as one of the Qianlong emperor’s favorite painters. He didn’t much enjoy his time in the gardens, because he was so busy painting in a cold studio, but he wrote a

description of the gardens that became well known in Europe.⁴⁹ He wasn't a great fan of architecture in China, whose monuments and buildings he found less impressive than those of Italy or France.⁵⁰ But he felt that Yuanmingyuan was extraordinarily beautiful: the odd, winding paths, the hundreds of palaces, temples, and towers, the canals that looked so natural with their jutting rocks and verdant banks. In Yuanmingyuan, he wrote, "everything is truly great and beautiful, both as to the design and the execution, and [these palaces] struck me the more because I had never seen anything that bore any manner of resemblance to them in any part of the world that I had been in before."⁵¹ Like Van Braam, he expressed the impossibility of describing their beauty. To a comrade back home, he wrote, "There's nothing similar here to our manner of construction and architecture. Only the eye can provide a true understanding, and someday, if I have time, I will send a few good drawings."⁵² It seems he never got the time. The emperor kept him so busy painting portraits and sketching banquets that his health suffered, especially since his workshop was exposed to the elements, having no heat except that provided by a little stove, on which he placed his paints so they wouldn't freeze solid.⁵³ Even he, however, appears never to have had a chance to see the emperor's own personal living quarters.

Van Braam and Titsingh are given unprecedented access. Even the Koreans, the foreigners with the closest relations with China, aren't on this tour. For a long time, the Koreans weren't even allowed inside Yuanmingyuan. The philosopher Hong Taeyong (洪大容 홍대옹), the first Korean envoy to mention the garden, only got as far as the main gate (正門) when he visited Beijing in the winter of 1765–1766. Guards watched in silence as he gazed at the pair of huge stone lions and tried to catch a glimpse of the gardens beyond.⁵⁴ Fifteen years later, in 1782, the emperor relaxed his policies and let the Korean envoys inside for a banquet. Now Korean envoys visit the gardens nearly every year.⁵⁵ But although they've visited many parts, it seems that they've not had a chance to look at this most intimate abode of the emperor himself.⁵⁶

The Dutchmen take their time, admiring scrolls and books, gems and antiques, and, most of all, the window with its magnificent views. When ready to move on, they're pulled in sleighs across the lake for a closer look at the towers and temples they've been gazing at.

After disembarking on the other side, they follow pebbled paths between cliffs "whose art augments nature" and through woods of pine and cypress. They see a fat buddha, a thousand-armed Guanyin, "idols and saints by the hundreds."⁵⁷ Titsingh thought that Chinese

landscape paintings were based on fantasy but changes his mind: “All that is so admirably picturesque in Chinese painting was here present in reality to the highest degree. We were swept away by the beauty.”⁵⁸ Of course, as Titsingh himself knows, these gardens are heavily curated, the designers working hard to ensure that each rock, tree, and rivulet contributes to the experience. Paintings imitate gardens; gardens imitate paintings.

They want to reach a summit, hoping that they might glimpse the European-style palaces depicted in Van Braam’s drawings, so they climb endless rugged stairs. The view is stunning, and they can see Beijing, but there’s no trace of European-style manors. They’re told that those buildings are twenty li away and, in any case, they’re in disrepair.⁵⁹ These distances seem fantastic, and it’s true that their hosts are exaggerating (the Western Palaces are about a mile and a half away, or five li), but the gardens do indeed seem endless.

On the other side of the mountain, the paths continue, past pavilions, temples with golden statues, murals of clouds, colossal goddesses, pyramids on marble pedestals, over hills and through dales. At one point, they come to a street of buildings watched over by a great castle. There are no people around, just the sound of a clear stream running next to the street. They’re told it’s a pretend village. At the emperor’s command, it becomes a marketplace. Eunuchs play the role of teahouse owners, hawkers, and merchants, selling real things—antiques, furniture, clothing, books, porcelain, and laquerware. Like Beijing merchants, they call out prices, grab people by the sleeves to steer them into their stores, and advertise bargains. Sometimes they even act out disagreements, prompting fake arrests and punishments.⁶⁰

Eventually, the tour ends, and they’re brought to a hall where Heshen waits. He asks what they thought. “We said,” writes Titsingh, “that in truth everything was far better than we’d ever seen before, and that we knew no place that compared to this in beauty.”⁶¹ And he’s not just being polite. He and Van Braam are truly astonished. Van Braam later writes:

Instead of rashly undertaking to express and describe with my weak pen all that my eyes admired; instead of endeavouring to communicate to my reader’s mind, the many, the varied and the extraordinary sensations produced incessantly in mine by the sight of so many things, in which singularity, magnificence, boldness of design and skill of execution were combined, it will be more simple and more natural to confess my incapability. The pencil of a great master is wanting to create in some sort anew so many accumulated wonders, and even then, I will venture to say, without seeking to save my own credit, that the copy will never be equal

Heshen is happy with their answer. He says the emperor wanted to give a special proof of his favor and affection. He's granted more to the Dutch than to any other foreigner, "since the foot of an alien had never before trod in the private apartments of his majesty; nor had any European eye ever perceived what [the Dutch] had been permitted to examine; that very few even of the natives of the country were fortunate enough to approach those places."⁶³

Heshen asks them to sit next to him and feeds them sugar cakes, grapes, jellies, and candied fruits. He also presents gifts from the emperor—rolls of silk, little embroidered pouches for tobacco, a snuff bottle, and some porcelain.

The envoys in turn entreat him to accept a gift. They've tried before, but he's always refused. This time, they try to insist, pointing out that the records show that past Dutch missions have delivered presents to grand officials. No luck. He says accepting presents would go against the laws and usages of the land. Moreover, he feels that it would be impolite to accept things from people who have suffered so much on such a long journey.

He says he has plenty of foreign items and shows his watch, a piece by John Arnold of London, manufacturer of some of the finest and most expensive watches in the world. He says he paid fifty taels for it, which Titsingh and Van Braam find shocking. In London, a watch like this sells for more than six times as much. They don't say this out loud: His low purchase price must have been a kind of bribe. Since officials aren't supposed to accept expensive gifts, they've devised a workaround. People sell expensive items to high officials like Heshen at well below market price. The buyer gets a sales receipt, proving that the exchange is legal. In this way, Van Braam writes, "the great personages about court are perfectly ignorant of the real price of things executed by the celebrated artists of Europe."⁶⁴

He and Van Braam are afraid to say any of this. "It would have been easy," Van Braam writes, "for us to give him a very intelligible explanation of this low price, but the fear of the consequences that might have attended it in respect to the transactions of the Mandarins and merchants of Canton, and particularly the risk that might be run by the former, prevented me from going into particulars, and we contented ourselves with expressing our surprise at such a watch being procured for so small a sum."⁶⁵

But it's likely that Heshen is aware of the value of the watch and is simply inviting the Dutch to offer a bribe-by-sale. He says he'd love to buy a watch or two from the envoys' entourage but finds the prices

too high, especially in comparison with this Arnold watch. He asks to see their watches. They show him but don't offer a bribe-sale, or if they do, they don't write about it in their reports.

The conversation ends. Heshen stands up. The envoys stand up. Friendly goodbyes are said. Leftover pastries and sweets on the table are wrapped up and given to the servants. And then they follow a winding stone road along a clear murmuring creek to their "splendid cars," in which they drive out through the palace gates and through busy streets, "exceedingly well pleased with the agreeable and unexpected excursion."⁶⁶

When they arrive, they find that Guignes, Agie, and the others haven't had such a good day. They weren't even allowed to go out for a walk. Trapped, they instead explored their compound. One large building seems to have been abandoned for a long time. It's empty, but that's not what they tell the servants. "We led the Chinese to believe that it contained cadavers," Guignes writes, "so they no longer dared to sleep alone." While they were wandering, a strange Chinese man approached them, making the sign of the cross and showing a rosary. He seemed furtive, and the gentlemen considered entrusting him with a letter to deliver to the court missionaries, but he didn't seem to know the missionaries' names. Fearing he was a spy, they sent him away.⁶⁷

The younger gentlemen wonder why they've been excluded from garden tours. Van Braam is told that the reason is simple. Their interpreter, the Frenchman Agie, "understands the Mandarin language too well, at least for the interest of our Mandarins."⁶⁸ He might reveal too much about activities in Canton. Nonetheless, writes Van Braam,

every day our conductors become more and more polite, and redouble their attention, because they perceive with what distinction their monarch treats us, and with what kindness he wishes to procure us frequent enjoyments. Convinced that they are so many marks of high favour, they take from them, as it were, the measure of what is due to our character, it being notorious to every one that his Majesty is exceedingly well satisfied with the Embassy, and with the conduct of those belonging to it.⁶⁹

In any case, Guignes and Agie and the other younger gentlemen will get a chance to see the gardens during the highlight of the New Year's season: the Lantern Festival.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

The Lantern Festival

THE MOST FESTIVE part of New Year's is the Lantern Festival, which falls on the first full moon of the new year, or the fifteenth day of the first month. Fireworks and ornate lanterns celebrate the return of light after the dark winter, but this year is different. Since a lunar eclipse will occur on the fifteenth, that night will lack the usual festivities. No one seems to mind. Celebrations are scheduled for all the other days. Two days before the full moon, the Europeans, including Guignes and the others, are invited to a fireworks party.¹

Van Braam is happy that no pre-dawn wake up is required. They get underway after lunch, trundling in carts along a busy road. They're not the only ones headed to the gathering. The road is filled with officials on horseback, mysterious palanquins covered in green fabric, horse-drawn carts that contain one or two people of high rank or eight or ten people of lower rank. Guignes thinks the horses of this province look like bears because they're so small and furry.²

When they reach a plaza outside the garden walls, crowds surge forward to have a look, as though they knew the foreigners were coming. The Europeans' VIP status gets them through a small gate, after the eunuch guards count them carefully. Soon they're walking along winding paths through the woods.

When they get to the drilling field, it's swarming with people, some of whom are setting up strange scaffolds.³ Guignes and the young men want to take a walk around, as they've been told they may, but unfortunately, Guignes writes, "the Chinese didn't keep

their promise.”⁴

Instead, they’re taken into a dusty yurt, and once their eyes adjust to the darkness, they see Koreans sitting to the side on cushions, dressed in long robes and wearing strange black hats that have wings sticking out from the sides. The men examine the Europeans in a friendly way and give each of the gentlemen some little golden pills the size and shape of a marble. They say this is a rare medicine, good for congestion and sore throats.⁵

More and more people crowd into the tent, raising clouds of dust.⁶ What’s particularly irritating is that there’s no furniture, so they’re forced to sit on their rolled-up coats, where the dust is thickest. Their formal clothes are getting dirty.⁷ The tent lurches as people lean and push, and Titsingh is scared it will tip over. An official enters, drives the curious people out, and fastens the flap. The dust subsides, and tea with buns and preserves provides relief to dry throats.⁸

Eventually, the gentlemen are released from the “accursed tent” and led across the field to the two-story building that dominates the field.⁹ They can’t read the calligraphy on the front, but the Koreans can: “Mountain High, Water Wide,” written in the imperial hand.¹⁰ Van Braam finds this palace “the least remarkable of any we have yet seen, nothing about it bespeaking an imperial residence.”¹¹ But it isn’t a residence. It’s a sort of gazebo, a place to watch the festivities on the plain below. The emperor’s throne stands in the center, nearly as exposed to the bitter wind as the carpets spread below for the ambassadors. The palace women are sheltered above, peeping out from little panes of glass on the second story.

In front of the hall stand strange wooden structures: tall poles with high wires strung between, intricate scaffolds with beams and crossbeams and cords hanging down, tiny houses on tall stilts, which look like belfries without bells, gates with fireworks suspended from them, and large wooden wheels mounted vertically on poles. Farther away, an honor guard stands in front of the trees. The Europeans sit down on carpets near the Koreans, Mongols, and Moslems. Behind them, curious people strain for a look, kept at bay by an occasional lash of the whip.

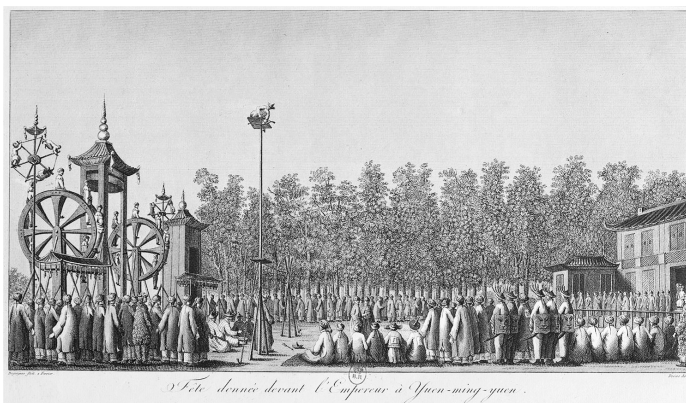


FIGURE 16. Festival in front of the emperor at Yuanmingyuan. “Fête donnée devant l’Empereur à Yuen-ming-yuen.” This engraving is likely from an original sketch by Guignes, depicting a Lantern Festival celebration in Yuanming Gardens.

Source: Chrétien-Louis-Joseph de Guignes, *Voyage à Péking, Manille et l’île de France: faits dans l’intervalle des années 1784 à 1801*, Vol. 4 (Atlas) (Paris: Treuttel & Würtz, 1808), plate 5. Public domain.

A silver trumpet sounds. The emperor appears. People begin singing in a way that reminds Guignes of the chant in French churches. The guests kowtow, and eight men dressed like girls, with short vests and ribbons in their braids, begin spinning around on the vertical wheels, always staying upright. These wheels are called Western Ocean Swings (西洋鞦韆), perhaps because the ball bearings making possible their rotation are from Europe.¹² At the same time, other people jump and twirl on the tightropes, or hang upside down.

Afterward, a group of Turkic musicians beat on drums, but this time their “detestable music” doesn’t end the show. Two of them step forward, dressed in vests, striped pants, and odd conical hats. One climbs a pole to a tightrope, holding a long piece of bamboo as a balance. He steps onto the cord so cautiously that the Europeans think he looks like an amateur. Once he has his footing, the man on the ground jumps. The man on the wire jumps. Each movement the man on the ground makes, the tightrope walker must imitate, leaping, spinning, dancing.¹³ “The least accomplished tightrope walker of Europe,” writes Guignes, “would have done it ten times better.”¹⁴ But the man has reason for fear. At one point, the emperor banned this performance altogether, because it was so dangerous: In the thirty-seventh year of his reign (1772), a performer fell from the wire, allegedly because he was drunk.¹⁵

Next, the tightrope walker climbs a cord to the top of a pole and seats himself on a platform. The man below tosses his hat onto the

ground. The man on the pole tries to shoot it with arrows but misses.¹⁶ While all this is going on, the music continues, and one of the musicians keeps trying to persuade a little goat to jump, but the frightened animal just hides between the musician's legs.

Van Braam hates these performances, writing that if they took place in Europe, they would hardly attract any spectators at all.¹⁷ The Koreans are more impressed. As one writes—admittedly not about this performance, but about one during his trip a few years earlier, “Galloping quickly, he climbed up the pole and walked on the tightrope—going back and forth—as though on the ground. The spectators cheered and called out ‘what a marvel!’ ”¹⁸ The emperor is happy with today's performance and gives the performers money.

The most interesting act involves fifty men in gray robes, each holding a lantern with a different number on it. They divide into squads and make various maneuvers, always maintaining the numbers in order, climbing on benches and twirling about. One man falls and must quickly jump up to regain his place, but overall, the performance is impressive.¹⁹

Throughout the entertainments, the Europeans are offered treats. “The Emperor,” writes Guignes,

deigned to think of us and sent us some little white balls swimming in some broth. This ragu, of which the view alone was enough to make my heart sink, bothered me greatly, but seeing one of the mandarins looking at it avidly, I offered him this dish, which he swallowed with an air of satisfaction. The Chinese brought us after this some deer tails and some preserves, and because it is the practice and manner of China to leave nothing, our domestics put everything pell-mell into a napkin in order to take it back to the house.²⁰

As the sun sinks low, two wagonloads of fireworks are pulled forward. Colorful flares jet up into the air—two feet, four feet, ten feet. Round cannisters on poles shoot cascades of multicolored sparks. Drums hanging from scaffolds open to show figures of flame: an old man, a tower with inscriptions, a large vase. Booths open and display flaming words.

While all these fireworks are being set off, two officials stand in front and fire off lines of firecrackers attached to the end of a stick. Sometimes the grass or shrubs catch fire. Firemen use pumps or bamboo sticks terminating in wet fabric to extinguish the flames.²¹

During the display, an official asks Guignes if there are fireworks like this in Europe. “I responded yes,” Guignes writes, “and he seemed astonished that we could be so ingenious.”²² Guignes is surprised that

the emperor and grand ministers are so enchanted by such “bagatelles,” which in Europe would only interest children.²³ Van Braam agrees, although he finds a few of the pieces quite pretty—especially the ones brought in the large wagons. He’s also surprised that there are no rockets.²⁴ Titsingh concurs: “Although the fireworks were beautiful, I had expected more, given the descriptions I’d heard. Setting them off during the day, and in bright moonlight, definitely was not favorable.”²⁵

The fireworks soon end, and it’s barely dark when the emperor gets up to leave. The crowds are thick, but the envoys’ escorts shove people out of the way to make room.²⁶ The crowd includes youths and children from the emperor’s family, who are treated, Titsingh writes, “with not the slightest deference.” The Europeans are back in their lodging by just after six o’clock, “happy to be back so soon.”²⁷

The next day,²⁸ Titsingh and Van Braam have a chance to see another part of Yuanmingyuan, when they attend a formal banquet in the Daguangming Hall (大光明殿). There is, unfortunately for Van Braam, a pre-dawn wake up, which is followed by a long wait in a dark room. As the sky begins to lighten, they’re led through the main gate of Yuanmingyuan and into a wide plaza at the end of which stands a magnificent building. It’s nearly identical to the imposing halls they have seen in the Forbidden City, which is no coincidence. When the emperors moved their main residence to Yuanmingyuan, they built this place as a replica of the Hall of Supreme Harmony in the Forbidden City, complete with the expansive courtyard paved in white stone. It serves as the main ceremonial hall of Yuanmingyuan, where the emperor receives officials and foreign dignitaries and holds grand banquets on special occasions.²⁹

They’re used to these banquets by now: the music, the kowtow, the little tables with fifty dishes, the treats sent from the emperor’s own table, the cup of wine he personally proffers, the pleasantries (Titsingh wishes him a long life and a happy reign, prompting a friendly smile and a bow of the head), and the multicultural entertainments: wrestling, songs, horsemen on stilts, and plays. There is one difference today: a strange slow dance by a group of men in fine robes, who advance two by two, in time to the music, rotate for a few minutes, and then end the number with a solemn kowtow. This is followed by the usual “Moorish” music the gentlemen so despise, after which the emperor rises and the banquet ends.

In the afternoon, they’re brought back to the drilling field for another lantern and fireworks display. Guignes and the younger gentlemen are mistakenly conducted into the tent of the main Korean ambassador, who, sitting sternly, makes clear his displeasure. They

laugh at him and go find their own tent, where they encounter the kind Koreans they met yesterday. This time, they're ready with gifts of their own: European penknives, pencils, and paper. The Koreans seem delighted and offer more Korean medicine. They stay for an hour in the dusty darkness until they're told that today's performances have been canceled due to the weather. They're not disappointed, returning to their lodgings "giving heartfelt thanks to the wind."³⁰

The next day is the fifteenth day of the first month of the lunar year, the day of the Lantern Festival. Typically, it would be celebrated with lanterns and firecrackers and plays and food, but the lunar eclipse causes the festivities to be postponed. The Europeans are confined to quarters, where they gripe about Chinese superstition. "The Chinese," Guignes writes, "believe that eclipses foretell calamity, and the Emperor, as superstitious as his subjects, would not dare do anything important in such circumstances. One sees by this that the missionaries have not succeeded in delivering the Chinese from their bizarre prejudices. The former calculate eclipses and explain their cause, but the latter, who are still persuaded that a dragon must be swallowing the sun or the moon, make as much noise as they possibly can in order to remove this misfortune."³¹ Van Braam, too, complains about the Chinese attachment to the idea that the emperor must perform "pious rites in favour of the Sun or Moon in order to rescue them from the dreadful fate with which they are threatened by the great dragon, who obscures the splendor of one or other of those planets, by holding them in his mouth with the intention of swallowing them."³²

The emperor of course knows the true causes of eclipses, and he's not overly worried about this one. Portents should be heeded, but his introspection has already taken place. It's just a matter of delaying the fireworks.

So the Lantern Festival is held the following day, when, once again, the Europeans find themselves in the drilling field in front of the strange structures. Guignes has brought his portable chair and sits down to sketch. A Chinese-looking man wearing a black ram's head approaches, "looking more beast than human." Guignes sketches him but is advised to stop. The strange man goes away. The Nan-san-dayin comes over to examine the chair, and with him is another minister, someone called the Fu-lieou-ta-jin. The man seems curious about the chair, so Guignes demonstrates it, sitting and standing, sitting and standing. The man doesn't know if this is meant to be funny, but Guignes is smiling, so he does, too. He asks if Guignes knows Chinese.

“Yes,” Guignes says. “A little.” They talk for a while, the man asking questions, with Guignes’s companion, Agie, answering in Chinese (Agie’s Chinese is better). They’ve been warned not to speak Chinese, but the man doesn’t mind. Guignes likes him and the other officials they encounter today, feeling that they treat him with the requisite esteem.

Today’s entertainments include the familiar wrestlers, acrobats, tightrope walkers, Moslems with a goat trained to jump to the beat of a drum, flares of fireworks, and lanterns depicting pagodas and towers. But then something new takes place: the traditional New Year’s dragon dance.

Guignes and the others watch with interest. The two huge dragon puppets are worked by many men, who open and close the mouths with cords. The dragons snake around, kowtow to the emperor, and then begin to dance, twisting and turning. Soon, a sphere appears, at the end of a pole: the pearl of wisdom.³³ It begins moving about, rising as the dragons watch, and then coming down and setting itself between them. They open their mouths, but the prey is too large, so they kowtow again and leave, followed by the pearl itself. As they depart, another dragon speeds down from the building along an iron cable.

This is a signal for the grand finale, a “terrifying racket” with innumerable firecrackers, cherry bombs, light balls, and flares.³⁴ Van Braam sees the finale as a kind of battle, with two teams representing armies shooting fireworks at each other, imitating muskets and heavy artillery. He likes it.³⁵

The following day, the travelers climb into little carts and, after being carefully counted, roll back to Beijing under the bright winter sun. They’d hoped to see more of Yuanmingyuan, especially those famous European-style gardens, but even the Koreans, it seems, have never had a chance to glimpse them.³⁶ Anyway, they’re happy to be leaving, because they’ve left much of their luggage in Beijing and the house there is more comfortable.

They do find it odd that they’ve been sent back to Beijing, because the emperor is staying in Yuanmingyuan, and Titsingh and Van Braam will have to come back tomorrow. Guignes thinks the reason for their expulsion is that he and Agie speak Chinese too well: “The mandarins had us leave out of fear that if we stayed there, they would be obliged to take us to the emperor and we would be able to complain, which they are afraid of very much. They know that we do not like them, and that we are not bothered by talking about their corruption.”³⁷

Titsingh, however, thinks it’s because Agie climbed a wall and

looked at women:

It's likely that [the decision for us to leave] originated in their concern for the women. Our party sought, in its confinement, some relaxation, and they amused themselves by playing outside on the square with a ball, which unfortunately went over the wall. Young Agie climbed up, and from there he had a wide view of all of the houses that lay around, where various women came out in their curiosity. Our house mandarin seemed displeased about this.³⁸

He notes that during the journey to Beijing, officials did their best to prevent them from seeing proper ladies [*fatsoenelijke vrouwen*]. "Our gentleman," he writes, "discovered a placard affixed to a bridge, which said that the Dutch ambassador would be passing by here and that all the women must remain in their houses."³⁹ He was told that this was a result of the English mission, but he's read accounts of previous embassies and finds evidence that they, too, were usually kept away from women, although "Tartar women" do seem to have more freedom than Chinese ones. In any case, the placard meant that "we only got an occasional accidental look at a respectable [*ordentelijke*] woman."⁴⁰

The ride back to Beijing is smooth, albeit dusty, and they arrive around noon to find the house in good order. In the afternoon, the Nan-san-da-yin comes for a visit, bringing his young son. They give the boy a snuff box set with pearls, which has a picture of a woman on it beneath a pane of glass.⁴¹ The Nan-san-da-yin also shows them a toy sawmill, whose wheel turns by means of fine sand falling through a funnel. "It was," writes Van Braam, "one of those playthings which are to be found in a thousand different shapes and to be purchased for a trifle in a European fair." The Nan-san-da-yin asks if they've seen this sort of thing before. They say they've seen far nicer versions. He asks why they've not brought any. Van Braam says that in Holland, such items are only for the amusement of children, so he and his comrades had no idea that they would hold any interest in China. The Nan-san-da-yin says that the opposite is true. He treats the item with a great deal of care, talking "in the language of a man who thinks himself the possessor of a wonder," marveling at how one can turn it over to restore the sand to the funnel.⁴²

This incident makes an impression on the Europeans, who feel that it says something about the Chinese character. "One can judge from this," writes Guignes, "the character of the Chinese. One should bring to Beijing silver, gold, pearls, i.e., things of value, and above all objects that amuse infants in Europe. These things will be preferred

to articles of the physical arts, or of science. These latter items do not really please Chinese.”⁴³ Van Braam sees a future business opportunity: “It is not at all improbable that these trifles would find a good market here, and that they would perhaps amuse the Emperor himself as much as the pieces of mechanism that we brought with us to Peking.”⁴⁴

Things have changed in Beijing. Now their servants are allowed to go out and shop. Is this because Heshen is in Yuanmingyuan? Is it because the emperor so clearly favors them? Maybe, but Guignes has a more cynical explanation: “It was only the greed of our mandarins that was the cause of this, because they feared that we would make them pay for things that we needed. If one of our domestics wanted to go into the city, all he had to do was say he needed to buy something and the door would open right away.”⁴⁵

Guignes gives one of the servants a letter and tells him to deliver it to the French missionary Grammont. Somehow the servant manages to find Grammont, who reads the letter and writes one in return. The servant hides it in his boot.⁴⁶ But there are checkpoints throughout Beijing, and the servants, being Cantonese, end up at the wrong gate. They’re seized and taken into a gatehouse, where guards accuse them of carrying opium. The servants deny the charge and plead for their freedom, explaining that they’re part of the Dutch embassy. This doesn’t impress the guards, who get out chains and make a show of preparing to clamp them on. The servants are terrified, especially the one with the secret letter. Fortunately, they have some money, which they’ve been given to buy supplies. They offer it to the guards, four piasters per person, no small sum. This works. The soldiers bring them back to the Europeans’ lodging.

The Europeans are angry about this incident. Indeed, the episode changes Van Braam’s mind about the reasons for their confinement. Perhaps, he muses, they’ve been kept from wandering Beijing for their own safety:

Here we see that even a Chinese is not in perfect safety in his own country, and to what a degree a private soldier may molest a man who does not belong to the place. What then should not we Europeans have had to dread, if leave had been given us to walk about? At any rate, we could not have moved a step in the streets without being escorted by a guard of soldiers, on account of the curiosity of the multitude crowding round us on all sides, as we experienced every day, even in the interior of the Imperial palaces. We have therefore reason to believe that it is from prudential motives that we are so closely guarded, in order to preserve us from a thousand affronts which might have been offered us by the dregs of the people. In what country indeed is it possible to control the mob?⁴⁷

Fortunately, the guards didn't bother searching the servants carefully, so Guignes gets Grammont's letter, which says that people in the court are very happy with the Dutch but expresses frustration that he's still not allowed to see them.

The next day Titsingh and Van Braam climb into carts and jolt painfully along the long road to Yuanmingyuan for another encounter with the emperor. He and Van Braam are tired of these constant celebrations, which seem to offer little new. This one has the usual wait in a little building, with snacks served on dull golden dishes, after which they're brought to the same field—the drilling field—and into the same kind of dusty tent, where they're receive the same kinds of medicine balls from the Koreans.⁴⁸ After this wait, they're taken out to the drilling field, where, as usual, they're "much irritated by crowds of onlookers of the most common sort."⁴⁹ There are the usual kowtows and approaches to the emperor's throne, and this time the emperor tells Titsingh that he should inform his sovereign about his treatment and reception in China. Titsingh bows and thanks his majesty, happy to be tasked with such an errand.⁵⁰ He doesn't yet know that the Prince of Orange is a refugee, having fled in a fishing boat from Holland as the French invaded.

There is the same painful sitting at the same little tables with the same pastries and sweets and mutton and the same entertainments: "Wrestlers, musicians, and jugglers were busied in their ridiculous performances, to which we did not deign to pay the smallest attention, although the old Emperor was so much amused with them that he ordered money to be distributed to these buffoons as a proof of his approbation."⁵¹ The wrestling drags on for an unusually long time, as combatants in sky blue pants and rough white tunics try to make each other fall over.⁵²

Titsingh does appreciate one new event. A pair of people dressed in opulent clothing—wide embroidered collars, a button of wrought gold, frizzy red fur on the hats—step forward and slowly sing and dance, spinning the body, moving arms, hands, and fingers and bowing the head. Titsingh is affected by the solemnity and is told that the singers are from the famous Board of Rites. The following performances are nothing special, and the last is, as usual, "the irritating Moors with their goat."⁵³

The grand finale, however, is suitably awesome. The field erupts with fireworks, firepots, cherry bombs, and other explosives. It seems that the display is a reenactment of a grand battle. Some of the members of the court even shoot fireworks from the second floor of the imperial gazebo. An account written by an unknown Chinese writer who apparently accompanied the Titsingh mission, and which

survives only in a French translation, notes that this “sham battle” (or perhaps the previous one—the dating is off by a day) is a reenactment of the Battle of Xiangyang, a traditional fireworks display:

A play was performed, called Pao ta siang yan tchin [probably 炮打襄陽城]. In former times, bandits attacked the city of Xiangyang with cannon. This was represented by actors, one side playing the aforementioned thieves and the other hidden in boxes carried by camels. Those men, however, were not perceived. At the sound of a cannon shot, they, the defenders, assumed positions as though representing city walls, with four gates, which is where the mandarins were. The bandits shot burning arrows into the place and the powder magazines of the city were embraced in the fire. During this disaster they continued firing the cannon, so the place was reduced to ashes. The soldiers who were in the city, reduced to despair, and seeing their homes burned, fell upon the brigands whom they defeated. A cannon shot was the signal for the end of the show, and everything disappeared.⁵⁴

The emperor goes into the building, and the guests begin leaving, but not the Dutch, who are invited to follow the emperor into the building. They’re led out the other side and along a canal path lined with little houses to a place where sleighs are clustered. They crowd in and glide on the clear flat ice below bare trees. Van Braam finds this night ride breathtaking. The canal’s banks are constructed of rock so as to appear, he finds, more natural than nature itself. It’s a very long ride, but finally, they arrive at a place marked by a pair of paper lanterns in the form of a sled that looks like a swan. This is the palace area called Zuoshi Linliu (坐石臨流).⁵⁵ The many buildings are beautifully illuminated.

They walk for some time before arriving at a brightly lit building, where the emperor sits on a platform flanked by high officials. The Happy-Together Garden (同樂園) is one of his favorite places to hold parties. Today, he’s giving a tea party for the princes and dukes and great ministers and Mongol nobles, and the Dutch have a place of honor next to him, where they sit and watch actors with paper lanterns and Moors juggling with a dish of dried fruits. Titsingh finds these first performances “pathetic,”⁵⁶ but the last is very interesting, because they think they hear the word “Holland” sung by a band of musicians.⁵⁷ They’re right. This is a composition in which the emperor expresses his gratefulness for good fortune, and the line the Dutch hear is likely this one: “The new and old feudatories each has its ceremonial place, but this year the Dutch celebrate with us the sixtieth year of reign.”⁵⁸

Typically, visiting dignitaries would join in the singing, but the Dutch are excused from this due to their linguistic ignorance. They're also not expected to reciprocate with a verse of their own, which is something that the Koreans excel at, due to their fluency with literary Chinese. One of this year's Korean envoys, Hong Yangho (洪良浩 홍양호) pens a celebratory poem:

Auspicious winds, luxurious greenery, entering the imperial gardens
Under blue skies the [emperor's] golden tent reflects the rising sun.
Bright star, song and music, a thousand officials clapping hands,
Ambrosia nectar [wine bestowed by emperor], fragrant and thick, ten
thousand dancers turning.
Approaching the five clouds [the emperor's abode], along with the inner
officials,
Rites so fine, three days, all the feudatories stepping forth.
[In] the red court, contending to present, gathered together to convey best
wishes for longevity and prosperity.
The left ocean [i.e., Korea] has long looked to the northern poles with
reverence and respect.⁵⁹

This last line about Korea looking to the northern poles (i.e., China's imperial court) with reverence and respect is the sort of thing Qianlong loves. The Hollanders can't write poetry like this or join in the singing, but the emperor and his officials have invited them anyway: "As to the tribute ambassadors from Holland, although they are unable to join in the song, yet, since these ambassadors are ranked equally with the Koreans, it is not suitable to follow a different procedure with regard to them."⁶⁰

After the tea party, Titsingh and Van Braam begin the long trek back to Beijing. When they finally reach their lodging, cold and aching from the carts, Van Braam exults about the beauty of the gardens to a sceptical Guignes, who writes, "Van Braam is a bit of an enthusiast, and since things that he had praised previously had often turned out to be very meager indeed when we went to see them ourselves, we believed it best to doubt in the beauty of these gardens."⁶¹

Guignes will never have a chance to know for sure. It's time to leave Beijing.

Goodbye, Beijing

IN THE DAYS leading up their departure, the screaming official lets them sleep in, because there are no official audiences or receptions, but he does come visit, and Titsingh shows off his collection of Japanese books. The man is especially intrigued by the *History of Great Japan* (大日本史), exclaiming that the Japanese must be superior to the Koreans to publish books like this. Titsingh is surprised. Apparently, Europeans aren't the only ones ignorant of Japan. The man is also fascinated by Titsingh's tomes about Chinese coins, saying that such works aren't available in China. When Titsingh says he has a Chinese coin collection, the man is incredulous, so Titsingh shows him samples.¹ If only there were time for more meetings like this—philosophers sharing enthusiasms across civilizations—but there are porters to pay, trunks to pack, and gifts to give.

Qing officials are also busy: They have decrees to issue, funds to disburse, and officials to punish and reward. Wang Shiji, whom Titsingh and the others hate, is to be rewarded. He's escaped blame for the Europeans' troubles on the way to Beijing, and the emperor is so pleased with the mission that he gives Wang Shiji a promotion. Another one of their escorts, Zhao Hongwen, also receives a promotion.² This contrasts with Lord Macartney's mission. His escorts didn't receive promotions. One was even demoted.³

There's one final ceremony in the capital: an official farewell, which takes place on February 10 in the Forbidden City's Taihemen Square. Guignes is invited and has his first chance to experience the vast ceremonial courtyards of the Forbidden City. He finds it lovely,

especially the little stream that runs across the paved court (内金水), crossed by five little bridges of white marble. He also admires the Meridian Gate, which looms to the south, its stark walls pierced by five gates, three in the middle and one farther out on each side.⁴ He likes the red walls and the fine woodwork on the galleries that run the length of the square on each side, with their gold and green and blue, a charming contrast to the shiny yellow roof tiles. Everything is clean and well kept. Yet he feels that there's something sad about how the whole fits together, a sense of grand desolation.

His impression of order and cleanliness vanishes when he's brought into a gallery to the side. Its outer walls are covered with signs and placards about current events.⁵ It's dirty inside, with no furniture, and the place rapidly fills with servants, porters, eunuchs, and officials, who push forward to look at him and his companions. One official gets mad and chases the crowd out, firmly shutting the door, but the people punch holes in the paper windows and keep staring.⁶ A eunuch who has managed to remain in the room studies the Europeans closely. The escort gestures with his hands toward his crotch to indicate the eunuch's lack of testicles. It's clear he doesn't approve. He lets the Europeans examine the eunuch for while and then says, "You've stayed long enough. Go away."⁷ The eunuch leaves.

They're rescued from the dirty room by the Nan-san-da-yin, who arrives with a grand suite and takes them south through one of the ports in the Meridian Gate. On the other side they find themselves in the long courtyard south of the Meridian Gate, whose massive walls wrap around on three sides, crowned by pavilions with curved roofs and small cupolas. After some marching back and forth, they're taken to the center of the courtyard, on the imperial way. A guard brandishes a whip to keep the crowds back, but he only strikes the ground, which doesn't frighten them away. An official grabs the whip and begins lashing people.

Officials from the Board of Rites line up next to the gate, dressed in red hats and large round embroidered collars that fall to their shoulders; they begin calling out instructions in a "lamentable voice": kneel, kowtow, kowtow, kowtow, stand.⁸ Three times Titsingh and Van Braam carry out the gesture, while Guignes and the younger gentlemen merely nod their heads, which seems to amuse the bystanders.⁹

Imperial presents are distributed: eighty rolls of silk for the Prince of Orange, and three strange vases; thirty-four rolls of silk for Titsingh; eight rolls of silk for Van Braam and the other gentlemen; fine-spun silk thread and linen for the European soldiers and

servants. In addition, they receive silver wrapped in yellow paper: 150 taels for Titsingh (about 180 ounces); eighty taels for Van Braam; forty each for Guignes and the other gentlemen; fifteen each for soldiers and servants.

After the gifts comes another kowtow, but Van Braam stands up too early and has to start again. After he gets it right, the ceremony ends, and the gentlemen walk out of the Forbidden City. Guignes is irritated that he has to carry his own presents whereas porters pick up Titsingh's and Van Braam's, but at least their carts are waiting at the Western Gate. "We got in," Guignes writes, "and said goodbye to the palace, which we would never see again."¹⁰

It's a relief to be done. "We returned to the lodging," Titsingh writes, "extremely happy to be finished with all these ceremonies, with nothing to worry about but preparations for our return."¹¹

Many important things remain to be done. For instance, Titsingh wants to ensure that gifts for Heshen and the other grantees are properly delivered. Van Braam takes charge, meeting with the Nan-san-da-yin and arranging a bribe-sale: "To-day ... a kind of arrangement has been made for the acceptance of the principal articles, on condition of our taking a few trifles in return, in order to give the appearance of an exchange to this gift, which would be contrary to the Emperor's prohibition forbidding all the Mandarins to accept presents under the penalties of forfeiting their employs and dignities. This affair was settled with the Nan-san-da-yin to the satisfaction of both parties."¹² Van Braam has also been selling watches and other things on the side, which he's not supposed to be doing.¹³

Guignes, for his part, wants to deliver the letters he's brought for the missionaries, but officials tell him he must give the letters to them, promising to deliver them to their recipients.¹⁴ Guignes insists he'll only deliver them personally, although he offers a compromise: he'll deliver the letters to their addressees in the officials' presence, if it will make them feel better. They demand the letters. Guignes leaves the room. The officials go talk to Van Braam, who tells Guignes to turn over the letters to avoid negative consequences. Guignes says that missionaries Raux and Grammont have explicitly instructed him not to give the letters to the officials. Van Braam says he must, promising that the officials will take the letters straight over to the missionaries, who are, Van Braam says, staying with the emperor at Yuanmingyuan. Guignes angrily gives the letters to Van Braam but soon thereafter gets a note from Grammont, who says he's not staying at Yuanmingyuan. "Thus," writes Guignes, "what the mandarins had announced was false."¹⁵

Guignes also has other supplies for the missionaries, such as cases of wine.¹⁶ The day before they leave, on February 14, French missionary Nicolas Joseph Raux arrives at their lodging to pick the items up. With him is a large group of officials, who seem anxious, as though trying to “read from our faces what we might be saying to each other.”¹⁷

Titsingh likes Raux. “Seldom,” he writes, “have I seen a man of better appearance. He was the very picture of health, and the Chinese clothing suited him particularly well. He spoke the language with a soft fluency that made it appear pleasant to us, whereas it is hard and sharp in the mouths of the natives. He seems to be entirely practiced in all of the little compliments and courtesies that are observed ad nauseam in their social intercourse.”¹⁸ He wishes he could talk to Raux in depth, but the officials are too watchful.

They seem particularly worried about the beautiful clocks for the emperor that were so badly damaged on the voyage to Beijing.¹⁹ Titsingh and Van Braam brought with them a talented Swiss horologist named Charles-Henry Petitpierre-Boy, who has been busy for the past weeks replacing springs, fitting gears, and adjusting tensions.²⁰ This isn’t his first time in Beijing. He came with Macartney two years ago and helped assemble the planetarium the British had hoped would impress the emperor, but his present task is much harder. For one thing, the planetarium hadn’t been dropped on the frozen ground and smashed to pieces. Moreover, last time he’d had help from the missionaries, some of whom are skilled in clockwork. This time, no missionaries have been allowed to help. The court sent some Chinese watchmakers, but Petitpierre-Boy couldn’t communicate with them, so he’s been laboring away on his own in a messy workshop, lacking suitable tables or workspaces.²¹ Pigeons stir up dust, which is harmful enough to such delicate mechanisms, but even worse are the officials and courtiers who insist on dropping by at all hours and trying to touch the clockwork.²²

Today, the officials want to make sure that work on the clocks is finished, or that the clocks are at least in a good enough state to be left here in Beijing for local experts to work on. They fear that Titsingh will want to take them back to Canton to repair, which would not look good for the escort who was supposed to get them safely to Beijing. They’re hoping Raux will persuade Titsingh to leave them here. Titsingh assents to this plan, and the officials are relieved, so they leave, taking Raux with them. The missionary’s departure disappoints Titsingh, who wishes for more time with him.²³

Guignes does get more time. Hearing that Raux has gone to Petitpierre-Boy’s workshop, just a few doors down, he rushes over

and finds the place filled with officials. He tries to warn them not to stir up dust, but they ignore him, crowding around to watch Petitpierre-Boy put the finishing touches on one of the clocks.²⁴

This gives Guignes an opportunity to talk to Raux. He tells the missionary about the voyage to Beijing and the awful horses and painful carts, complaining about how the escorts refused to provide litters carried by mules on the pretext that they were only used by women. Raux says that this is a ridiculous excuse, because two missionaries who came to Beijing last year rode in precisely this sort of vehicle. Guignes tells him how careless Wang Shiji and the other escorts were and how the porters broke the clocks. Raux says this doesn't surprise him, because when he went to examine the presents that the Dutch submitted to the emperor, he was surprised to see two inferior pieces of clockwork. He enquired and learned that the good ones had been broken en route and that the prime minister had substituted these poor pieces—made by Chinese mechanists—out of a desire to protect the official who had been in charge of transporting the original ones.

Raux says that this subterfuge explains another mystery of their visit: their unusual confinement. Other ambassadors are generally free to come and go as they please. So why were the Dutch controlled? Not, Raux says, because the escorts were afraid that the Dutch might talk about corruption in Canton, or because they wanted to forbid all communication with missionaries. Instead, he says, it was simply because the prime minister and others were afraid that the Dutch would find out about this subterfuge with the presents and expose it. Guignes is disgusted. The emperor has seen only these two miserable pieces and may never learn that the ambassador brought two magnificent ones. “By this one can judge,” he writes, “the country and the intrigues that they practice.”²⁵

It's no wonder that the emperor and officials weren't very impressed by the gifts, which seemed inferior to Macartney's. As a memorandum from the Grand Council notes, “We find that the country of England presented, in all, six large instruments, whereas now the country of Holland merely presents one pair of musical clocks and four pairs of gold watches. The rest of the items, such as camlets, great cloth and other such things, is in quantity not even one or two tenths of what the country of England presented. As for the sandal-oil and [other such items], ... these are by no means valuable articles and are moreover given to make up the number. Compared to what the country of England presented there is certainly a great difference.”²⁶

Yet the gift issue doesn't seem to have affected the mission, and

Raux repeats what they've heard from others: The emperor is extremely happy with the Dutch mission, and all of the grandees and high officials have praised the Dutch and say that the embassy has brought great honor to the Dutch nation.²⁷

Another order of business is the acceptance of the emperor's official letter to Prince William of Orange, which arrives at the lodging in grand parade. After it's been placed on a table and kowtowed to and the officials have left, Titsingh and the others unwind the yellow silk from the bamboo case and pull out the large sheet of colorful paper inscribed in Chinese, Manchu, and Latin. They read the Latin.

The letter is, Titsingh finds, "very singular."²⁸ In the Chinese context, it's a warm and generous letter, but to the Europeans, the language is grandiose:

For the past sixty years, since I received from heaven this empire, I have governed so well, on the one hand by munificence and on the other by instilling the terror of my name, that peace and happiness reign throughout and the moeurs of neighboring nations have been improved.... Verily, I exert all my efforts to govern well, and the sincerity of those who come to admire me pleases me.... I laud your government for having sent, despite the distance that separates it from China, letters and presents. Understanding your good intentions, your veneration for me, and the praises that you give me and which are true, I conclude that my manner of acting pleases you.²⁹

Also grandiose is the language about the presents. It's standard rhetoric that the emperor's presents should be more valuable than those of the guests. After all, the emperor is considered to stand at the center of All under Heaven. Just as a father gives more than he expects in return from his children, so the emperor should show munificence to all others.

The emperor's lines about gifts sound arrogant to the Europeans: "The Portugese, the Italians, the English, and others have offered me precious things and recognition. I cherish all of this and act without partiality. Although the presents that they give me are not much, you know that my mode is to respond a hundred-fold."³⁰ The Europeans certainly don't feel that the emperor's presents are a hundred times more valuable than their own. As Guignes writes, "It must be admitted that his majesty has a high opinion of himself and of his presents, which, truth be told, were quite meager and little worthy of a prince as powerful as him."³¹

In the evening, the Nan-san-da-yin comes and charms them with his goodbyes. Titsingh writes that he's "an uncommonly civilized and

friendly gentleman, a contrast to the mass of courtiers.”³² Van Braam describes him as “the consummate courtier.”³³ The Nan-san-da-yin assures Van Braam that he’ll put in a good word for him to the viceroy and the superintendant of maritime trade in Canton. He reveals that he even has hopes of becoming superintendant himself, “and that in that case he would afford special protection to the Dutch nation, with whose agents he should be happy to form a friendly connection.”³⁴ The envoys’ goodbyes are heartfelt.

The next morning, it’s time to leave, and hordes of officials descend on the compound, ordering around servants, valets, porters, and lesser officials. Raux comes, too, with fresh-baked bread. This time, Titsingh gets a chance to talk to him, learning details of the missionary’s life in China. He and his companions live happily enough, with a house here in the city and a garden estate outside it to relax and make wine (Titsingh likes the wine). But conditions aren’t as good as they once were. Religion, he says, is the only thing that props him up, and he hopes to return to Europe in four or five years. Titsingh wonders privately whether that’s a good idea. “I believe ... that given the present troubles, they would be no happier in Europe, and many of them would say farewell to China only with regret.”³⁵

As they’re talking, a dispute breaks out about transportation. Guignes and the younger gentlemen have asked for horses but are told that this is against the emperor’s orders. They’re angry, because the emperor made it clear that the Dutch party is to be accommodated in all possible ways, and they ask Raux to intercede.³⁶ He gets them horses, prompting Guignes to observe, “one can judge from this the extent to which these people are liars.”³⁷ Raux tells them that most officials in the palace “n’ont pas le blanc manger,” meaning that they are not people in possession of the finer things. Everyone wrings out money where he can get it. He advises them to remain firm to avoid being taken advantage of.

This is advice Guignes will keep in mind on the long journey back to Canton.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

By Land through Beizhili and Shandong

TITSINGH IS WORRIED about the journey, having heard that Lord Macartney had a “most distressing” time on the same route back to Canton. Apparently, his Lordship was “short of everything,” and people who saw him upon his return said he was so gaunt that he was almost unrecognizable, as though he’d aged ten years.¹ But Qing officials promise that Titsingh and his companions will receive special treatment, including banquets in each of the provinces and sightseeing tours. No such favors were shown to Macartney, who was rushed back to Canton so fast that, in Van Braam’s words, he was “given no rest until such time that his escort had brought him back to his warship and seen him sail away.”²

They’re told that this journey will be very different from their trip to Beijing, because most of it will be by boat, with beds and servants and wine close at hand. They’ll pass through the wealthiest and most beautiful parts of China, and at a leisurely pace. Whereas their trip to Beijing covered 1,450 miles in fifty days, a grueling average of twenty-nine miles per day, the trip to Canton will cross 1,665 miles, but more slowly, at an average of twenty miles per day.³ They’ll also be traveling in the spring, when the land comes alive with wheat, mulberries, rice, and blossoming peaches.

It’s still wintry when they leave their compound on February 17,

cold and gusty, but it's a festive parade, with soldiers and music. Titsingh and Van Braam rattle painfully along the cobblestones in their carts. Guignes, keeping in mind Raux's advice to stand firm, demanded a horse, but it reared as he tried to mount, knocking over a servant and galloping away, so he's in a cart as well.⁴



MAP 5 Dutch embassy's journey overland from Beijing to Qingjiangpu, Jiangsu, and then by boat as far as Quzhou, Zhejiang. *Source:* Cox Cartographic, Ltd.

When entering Beijing, he'd been ill and didn't get to see as much of the city as he'd hoped, so he pays careful attention now, writing about the imperial park, the narrow city streets, the choking dust, the detestable road. He's surprised how quickly they seem to leave the city behind, passing through fields with a just a few scattered houses. How did he miss the tunnel through the walls? Is it because his cart mate is sitting in front and he can't see properly? Sharing a cart has advantages, though. The official hands him a flask, and Guignes sips the strong liquor. The man takes a big draught and passes it to the driver, who shares it with the other servants. In this way, the dust and the interminable road seem less vexing.

Suddenly, the cart is in the middle of the busy metropolis again, and Guignes recognizes the main road of the Chinese city, the one they'd followed on their way in, with the stores and stalls. And then, looming before them, he sees the Guang'an Gate, the one they'd passed through on their way into Beijing.⁵ So they had been inside the city walls the entire time? He could have sworn they were out in the country. How strange that these areas, surrounded by walls, are so empty. This sort of thing doesn't happen in Europe, whose walled cities tend to be packed with buildings. And this is the capital of China.⁶

The sun's going down as they pass through the walls and climb gratefully out of their carts. Van Braam and Titsingh get in their palanquins. Guignes mounts a less skittish horse. The travelers set out across the flat, dry landscape.

They'll have to travel by land for two and a half weeks, across the provinces of Beizhili and Shandong and then into Jiangsu, where they'll find their boats at the Grand Canal Port of Qingjiangpu (清江浦). The first part of their trek will trace the route they followed before, but then they'll diverge, heading westward past famous Mount Tai.

This time the land trip turns out to be easier. To be sure, the freezing wind kicks up dust storms so intense that at times Titsingh can't even see the people carrying his palanquin. (Local travelers wear goggles, but the Europeans don't have this protection.) And Beizhili is filled with signs of desperation: a dead man by a village near Beijing, run-down houses of clay in Zhuozhou (涿州), crumbling walls in Xincheng (whose name, Guignes observes, ironically means "New Wall"⁷), miserable temples and neglected idols in Xiongxian.⁸ The lodgings are bad, the food poor, and the bedding doesn't always arrive in time. But the pace is reasonable, and there's time to explore. In Fangguan (方官), they watch an itinerant ironsmith use a tiny coal-fired furnace to melt ingots, repairing pots quickly and cheaply. His

entire workshop fits on his back, including the bellows.⁹

They are also given special celebrations. The emperor has decreed that each province they pass through must throw them a banquet, with plays and performances. The first takes place in the city of Hejian, Beizhili. They parade into town, dressed in their best, past “ruinous houses” and abandoned lots. Titsingh speculates that most of China is poor and that only the coastal areas truly live up to the reports of the missionaries.¹⁰ At the prefectural government compound, music is playing and soldiers are lined up. The prefect greets them at the gate and leads them into a courtyard, where the emperor’s chop stands on a yellow altar. Everyone kowtows and proceeds to a courtyard with an ornate theater and little tables, some piled with gifts. Titsingh and Van Braam sit on red cushions, each at his own table, as do other officials.

The emperor’s decree is read out loud, and here’s how Van Braam records a translator’s words in his diary:

His Majesty, having taken so much pleasure in the Dutch embassy, both because of the behavior of the ambassador and *his greater esteem for the Dutch than for the English*, has ordered the mandarin of the city to host us on his behalf with a banquet and some presents and otherwise to treat us with all kindness possible.¹¹

In fact, the emperor’s decree says nothing about liking the Dutch more than the English. The emperor actually says that his intention is to make things fairer. The British, he says, were fêted on their short voyage from the northern coast to Beijing, but the Dutch received no banquets on their much longer journey, because they were in such a hurry. The emperor says he feels bad about this, writing:

But now, this ambassador and his suite on their voyage, as they passed through the provinces, received no banquets, and this is a case of identical Western Ocean ambassadors receiving different treatments, and we have thus not lived up to the great impartiality of the Chinese system. This tribute ambassador and his suite, upon learning of this, will certainly feel a bit disappointed and resentful.¹²

Therefore, the emperor explains, he is ordering officials in each province to celebrate with the Dutch ambassadors, and this edict must be read out loud at each banquet.¹³

Although the emperor says he’s ordered this expedient due to fairness, he knows well that the British only passed through one province and thus received just one banquet on their way to Beijing,

since they sailed up the coast, whereas the Dutch will pass through six provinces on their return to Canton. Macartney was not given banquets on his return to Canton, even though he followed the same route Titsingh is following, because the emperor wanted him rushed out of China.

Officials with gold buttons serve alcohol and a tremendous variety of dishes, one after another, and the governor raises his cup and urges them to eat and drink more, leading by example. While they dine, there's a play to watch, and child acrobats.

Not everyone is treated so well. Guignes and the younger gentlemen are taken to an area to the side. He feels that he's being treated like a servant and leaves in anger, climbing back on the starving horse he's been given and plodding along a dusty street lined with sad houses. Everything seems desolate. The countryside is filled with workers spreading wheelbarrows of manure.¹⁴ His horse is struggling, and he abandons it and walks. His indignation is aroused again when he and his young companions reach the day's destination: Xianxian (獻縣). A nice house has been adorned with pennants. Thinking it's intended for them, they start to go in. But no. They're taken instead to a run-down building. It seems that Wang Shiji intends to stay in the nice place.

Guignes and the others are determined not to be treated this way. Recalling the advice of Missionary Raux, they return to the nice house and chase the escorts' servants out, claiming it for the ambassador. When Titsingh arrives in the evening, he thanks them for saving him from a "common hut."¹⁵ There don't seem to be any negative consequences to this action, so the next night, in Fucheng (阜城), they do it again. "The Chinese," Guignes writes, "wanted to close the door, but we kept them from doing that and took possession of the house."¹⁶

Beizhili seems to be continually grim: dusty fields, sad houses, crumbling pagodas, and another frozen corpse. But the people don't seem so insolent now. When Guignes gets lost, a small Chinese man comes to save him: "He came running after us as fast as his legs could carry him. We laughed a lot to see him coming, his arms and legs moving around like a windmill. When he got to us he was totally out of breath, but he took us with him along the correct route."¹⁷

It takes just five days to cross the Province of Beilizhi, and at the border, they find the Grand Canal, whose banks are jammed with vessels. It's not yet time for them to climb aboard, because the canal is still too frozen, so they cross on a bridge made of boats, watching chunks of ice float past.¹⁸

Shandong Province seems more prosperous. The city of Dezhou,

where they receive a banquet, has fine walls, nice houses, and bustling stores, which unfortunately seem to deal mainly in Chinese hats.¹⁹ They get a banquet here, which Titsingh finds even more elegant than the last one until he sees how the food is prepared: "Two common cooks in dirty clothes outside the hall would grip a suckling pig or goose in their bare hands and skin it with their fingernails and a dirty knife, after which it would be set down on little dishes in front of the guests."²⁰

He doesn't eat much, but the entertainment is good: fifty performers change their beautiful costumes five or six times, and skilled young acrobats perform during the intermissions.²¹ Afterward, the envoys are paraded through the city, soldiers marching in front, musicians banging cymbals, and officials on horseback holding a parasol and a big sign with golden letters. The prefectural magistrate of Dezhou bobs along in his elite green palanquin, accompanied by his own cortege of twenty-nine horsemen. Through the city they file and out the gate into the extensive suburbs, where soldiers fire salutes. This kind of treatment is much better than the rushed voyage to Beijing.²²

As they head south, the countryside becomes greener and more populous. Hamlets nestle among groves of cedar and cypress, and there are dense orchards and fertile fields. "All of this," writes Van Braam, "formed the most beautiful view that I'd seen for a long time, particularly when gilded by the rays of the setting sun."²³ In Pingyuan (平原), they stay in a lovely house below the walls, and the governor of the province smokes a pipe and drinks Cape wine with Titsingh.²⁴ Guignes doesn't have such a good time, because he feels that one of the local officials insults him. Seeing Van Braam, the man says that he must have a lot of spirit and wealth because he has such a large stomach. "We who were skinny," Guignes writes, "he saw as fools and poor devils."²⁵

But it's pleasant to be in such a prosperous land, so different from their former route. "One must discern," Titsingh writes, "based on the appearance and clothing of the inhabitants, that things are better here."²⁶ It's populous and packed with farms. Van Braam counts and claims that "this part of the province is inhabited by more cultivators than the western districts which we passed through in our way to Peking, and which appeared to us so wretchedly poor."²⁷ He marvels at the fields planted so evenly and buys a sowing machine for a dollar and a half, although Guignes sniffs that it's too weak to work in anything but the very lightest soil.²⁸ In the city of Yucheng (禹城), Van Braam eats the largest pear he's ever seen, yellow as a lemon, crisp, juicy, and sweet. The yellow carrots in the markets are far larger than

the famous orange carrots of Hoorn, and there are “turnips of prodigious size.”²⁹ Even the soldiers seem to get larger, although the women, Guignes finds, are small.³⁰

Shandong is known for its famous mountains, especially Mount Tai, which is reputed to confer long life on people who climb to its peak. The emperor climbed Mount Tai a number of times in his younger days. Maybe that’s why he’s so healthy at such an old age.³¹ They approach the famous peak’s northern foothills on February 25, zigzagging up a steep path and entering a canyon between two rocky inclines, where the wind stirs up suffocating clouds of dust. The villages here are picturesque, with steep roofs. A castle fortress looks down from a high peak. A temple perches on a verdant mountaintop.³²

This mountain road is surprisingly full of carts, wheelbarrows with sails, and crowds of people, whom Guignes doesn’t like. “They were very mocking,” he writes, “and stopped in order to laugh right in our faces.”³³ Maybe if he weren’t so skinny, he’d get more respect.

Most of the places they stay are lovely, such as Zhangxia (張夏), whose “situation among the mountains gives it a very striking appearance.”³⁴ Titsingh writes, “nowhere had we experienced so many towns and villages, all of which were full of hostels and little stores, which make their living from the great traffic.”³⁵ They spend one night right beneath Mount Tai, near the city of Tai’an (泰安). They don’t hike up, perhaps unconcerned with their longevity. Van Braam will die at sixty-one and Titsingh at sixty-seven. Guignes, who is particularly irritated by Chinese superstition, will live to eighty-six.

Usually their lodgings are pleasant, but there are exceptions. In a village just past Mengyin (蒙陰) City, they have to share a small house with a schoolmaster and some florists. The Europeans get the best rooms, but it’s cramped, and Guignes thinks that they were supposed to be lodged in a better house that Wang Shiji took for himself. Frustrated, the Frenchman is in no mood to play the good foreigner: “They asked us if we had women in our country. We said no. In our country children grow on trees.”³⁶ The following morning, his saddle is gone. He suspects the caretaker of the house, or maybe the groom of a marriage that will soon take place here. Fortunately, he removed his travel bag, because otherwise he would have lost his journal, the very journal in which he records this story.³⁷ He gets another saddle, which is worse, but he climbs into it and trots into a countryside filled with buffalo, sheep, and pigs, but only a few men, whom he finds ugly. “The women,” he writes, “are no better.”³⁸ That night, they sleep in a “common hut” in Qingtuo (probably 青駝).³⁹

The mountains give way to a vast, flat country, where the soil

becomes darker and richer. It's still the dry season, but the porters often have trouble getting the palanquins and other burdens across the many waterways, especially at the Beng River (沔河), which is so wide and low that it's more like a vast marshy valley than a proper river.⁴⁰ When officials declare that they plan to fire Titsingh and Van Braam's porters and hire new ones, presumably to save money, the Dutchmen protest. The teams are retained.

By early March, when they reach the border of Jiangsu Province, the weather is getting warm, and people are plowing, planting, and piling earth around the trunks of young trees, although sometimes when the Europeans arrive in a town, people leave the fields to come look at them.⁴¹

On March 5, a beautiful day, they reach the Grand Canal again, climbing a paved dike thirty-five feet wide, and marching along it. Not far away, the Yellow River runs parallel, its dikeworks even larger. The embankments extend as far as the eye can see and are, Van Braam writes,

fully as handsome as those in Holland, and at least fifty feet thick at the top. The side towards the water descends with a great inclination, like the dikes made in the United Provinces within the last forty years; for it seems that it was not observed till then that the water has less action upon a surface much inclined, than upon a plane nearly perpendicular, and that by applying this principle to embankments they might almost always be preserved from accident. The Chinese, however, were aware of it from the first formation of their dams.⁴²

These dikes are so high that the travelers can't see the river, just the tops of sails floating past.

Another impressive sight is a head in a bamboo cage on a post. A sign says its erstwhile owner stole something and then, when found out, committed murder and was publicly executed by order of the emperor. This, Guignes writes, "does honor to the Chinese and their police."⁴³ In fact, the emperor's authority is so strong that they see two wheelbarrows filled with money from the salt tax with no guards or soldiers watching over them.⁴⁴

They follow the canal dikes for a couple of days, sometimes on top, sometimes below in the fields, always at a pleasant pace. Just as they're about to reach the place where they are to cross the Yellow River and board their boats, the weather gets cold and foggy and then dark and windy. A storm is coming, and they want to reach shelter. Guignes's horse won't go any faster, so he gives it to one of the attendants, who thinks he can do better with it. Guignes feels

happy when the man gets so tired from hitting it that he, too, gives up on it.⁴⁵

They reach the crossing just as the storm hits. It's too late to pass over, so they spend the night crammed into a little room in the river station of Wangjiaying (王家营), the wind blowing through a gap above the door. But Titsingh is happy. If they hadn't rushed here, he would have had to take shelter in a watchhouse without walls.⁴⁶

The wind howls all night, lightning flashing through the downpour, which turns to hail and snow in the morning. There's no question of crossing in this weather, so they're stuck for another night, trying to stay warm as the snow blows through the gap above the door.⁴⁷

The following morning, the storm has passed, but Titsingh fears they'll have to spend another night, because ice covers the courtyard, and it's twenty-nine degrees Fahrenheit outside, with a piercing wind. Fortunately, the escorts deem the river passable. Workers begin transporting trunks to the riverside. At nine o'clock, Titsingh climbs in his palanquin to be transported himself.

Wangjiaying is a busy node of commerce and communication that sits on the tawny clay banks of the Yellow River, sending earthen jetties out into the brown water for ferries and barges to dock. Workers have laid out bundles of straw on the banks for traction, but the porters slip in the icy mud. Guignes and Agie watch them embark the horses. The first gets aboard safely. The second slips and gets tangled on the side of the ferry. They cut the tackle and the animal falls into the river.⁴⁸

The Yellow River is not much more than half mile wide here, but a tiresome official makes the trip seem interminable.⁴⁹ He tells Guignes all about how he crossed the river with the English. "He would have told us a lot more if we'd wanted to listen."⁵⁰

The opposite bank is an expanse of mud, through which the gentlemen are carried by porters. At the end of the mud, Titsingh and Van Braam climb into their palanquins. There are sedan chairs here for Guignes and the other gentlemen, too, but they refuse them, finding them the worst they've ever seen, and instead ask for horses. They ride away as soon as the horses are saddled, "in order to be rid of the blabbering mandarin."⁵¹

The canal port of Qingjiangpu (清江浦) is a short, sunny ride away, through soggy fields. It seems a prosperous place, and the quay is full of people who watch the Europeans embark. The boats are lovely.⁵² Titsingh's has a large room with four large windows on each side, which he decides will become his dining room, and behind it is a sitting room, and behind that a bedroom. A fourth room houses his

valet, and there are rooms in back and on the top for captain and crew. Van Braam's boat is similarly equipped, and even Guignes's is "large and commodious," with four main rooms and a kitchen.⁵³ If only he didn't have to share it with two others.

While the workers load the boats, the gentlemen go shopping. The stores are good, and they find fine porcelain and plenty of supplies. Just before nightfall, they push off into the Grand Canal, heading downstream toward the wealthiest and most populous part of China. "I was," writes Titsingh, "utterly pleased to see an end come now to all of the many kinds of fatigues that we had suffered, and to be able to look forward to carrying out the rest of the voyage in all comfort."⁵⁴

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Sailing into Spring

BY CANAL THROUGH THE LOWER YANGTZE

THE CANAL FEELS more like a river than a Dutch-style gracht: turbid, with a fast current. Crewmembers run alongside on the dike, each carrying two light wooden anchors, one of which is attached to the front of the boat and one to the back. The pilot calls out orders, and the men drop their anchors accordingly, drawing the front or back of the vessel toward the shore. In this way, they steer downstream. Sometimes, they use pulleys to raise the mast so they can use the sails, but the wind is mostly contrary, so the mast usually rests flat against the side of the boat. Occasionally the wind blows so fiercely that they just tie the boats to the wall and wait.

The boats' windows offer scant protection against the cold wind, but one can warm oneself by the stove and look out at the busy world sliding by: people plowing; water pouring through sluice gates down into fields; clay houses built right on the dikes themselves; special wooden boardwalks for horses; jetties made with clay and straw, which must continually be rebuilt because the water erodes them. Occasionally, the roof of a colorful pagoda drifts by; or a huge flock of crows wings its way southward; or they pass one of the region's many lakes, such as Gaoyou Lake (高郵湖), whose vast surface is covered with fishing boats. Sometimes they encounter an imperial rice barge as it heads up toward the capital, bedecked with colorful

banners and ornate carvings.

The stone quays in front of the canal ports are so crowded that Van Braam thinks them busier than Amsterdam itself. They glide by one town after another—Baoying (寶應), Fanshui (汜水), Gaoyou (高郵)—and then on March 12, they reach the first great city of the lower Yangtze: Yangzhou, famous for its gardens and temples.¹ They won't get to tour the city itself, but there are sights outside the walls. On the northern outskirts, singing monks welcome them into the gates of the Tianning Temple (天寧寺), serving tea and showing the extensive grounds, with statues of thirty-armed goddesses and buddhas on flowers.² News of their arrival has spread, and by the time they get back to their boats, the banks are teeming with people. They've encountered many crowds during their voyage, but this is the largest.

The women don't try to hide themselves, a pleasant contrast to previous experiences.³ "It's difficult," Guignes writes, "to pronounce on their beauty, because they are in the practice of whitening the face and painting the lips and eyebrows (*sourcils*). The men looked much better."⁴ But Van Braam is enthusiastic. Indeed, he sounds aroused:

In the course of the day we remarked many pretty women and particularly admired the family of a great Mandarin, which passed by us in three large yachts. The charming women they contained stood at the windows in such a way as to see and be seen equally well. Three or four of them were perfect beauties. We may then safely say that we are still more unfortunate than Tantalus, since to his torments our inflamed imagination added, in a delusive dream, the punishment of the audacious Ixion.⁵

Tantalus was punished for his transgressions by never being able to quench his thirst. Ixion was affixed to an endlessly turning wheel for mating with a cloud that looked like Zeus's wife. Van Braam is on a boat in China looking at pretty ladies.

It takes two hours to float past Yangzhou's crowded quays. "Everything," Titsingh writes, "seems lively and busy."⁶ The city's gates and ramparts don't seem well maintained, but there are impressive buildings and temples, especially the customs house. Taxes and tolls raised along the Grand Canal are a major source of revenue for the Qing state, and Yangzhou is a major contributor.⁷

Just beyond the city limits, they reach an unusual octagonal tower, which captivates Van Braam. It's seven stories high, crowned by a tall, pointy roof with a spherical brass spire at the top. Eight golden chains hang down from the spire to the corners of the roof, and bells dangle from the eaves.⁸ Later he'll emulate this very tower

when building a sumptuous mansion called “China Retreat.” For now, he just makes careful drawings, as does Guignes. The tower is part of the Gaomin Temple (高旻寺) complex, first constructed 1,100 years earlier and still one of the most important Buddhist monasteries in China. The emperor stays here when he visits Yangzhou, although it’s been almost two decades since his last visit.

They want to stop and explore but are told they must move on, which angers Guignes, because “the emperor had expressly ordered them to let us see everything remarkable.”⁹ They catch glimpses of arches and woods and waterways behind the walls.

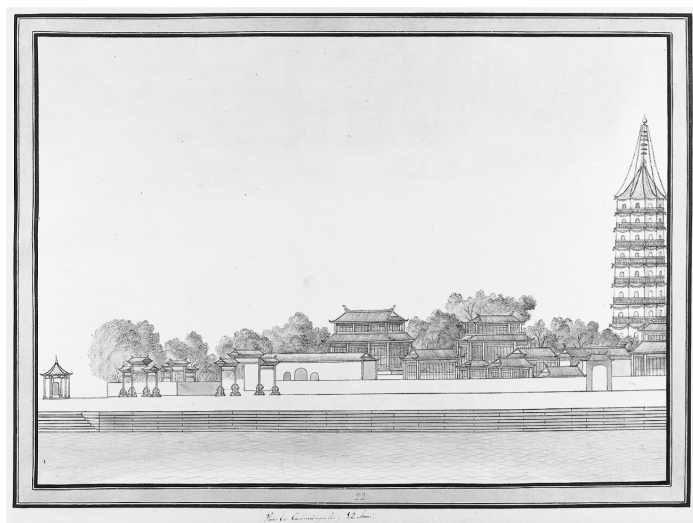


FIGURE 17. Gaomin Temple, near Yangzhou. “Vue de Cau-ming-tsi, 12 mars.” An anonymous

Chinese artist based in Canton painted this piece on commission from A. E. Van Braam Houckgeest, possibly from a sketch by Van Braam. Van Braam was deeply impressed by this tower of the Gaomin Temple (高旻寺) complex, on which he would model a pagoda on top of his own house, China Retreat.

Source: Album of Chinese drawings and documents, BR 350, no. 22, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Florence, Italy. Reproduced by permission of the Ministero per i beni e le attività culturali e per il turismo / Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Firenze. Reproduction prohibited.

But the next day they have a stroke of luck. A traffic jam on the Grand Canal gives them a chance to tour a different imperial garden.¹⁰ The trails are overgrown, the pavilions falling into ruins, the beams and windows rotting, the wallpaper peeled away, the canals dry, the covered walkways crumbling, and the bridges so dilapidated that the visitors scarcely dare cross them, but Van Braam is effusive. “Even in its present state,” he writes, “this place is

rendered worthy of attention by the variety of its edifices, by the diversity of the ground interspersed with rocks, by its pavilions, its lakes, its bridges, &c. Everything is disposed according to a system in which art seems to hide herself in the midst of the irregularities of nature; while the studied confusion of trees, fruit, flowers, and brambles compose a scene that seems due to chance alone.”¹¹ He only wishes he could adequately describe the beauties of a Chinese garden to European readers:

Everything is intermingled, and seems on the point of being confounded; but the triumph of genius is to prevent the smallest disorder that might hurt the eye. Every instant a new combination affords a new variety, so much the more agreeable and striking, as it has been the less possible to foresee it; the spectator’s surprise being constantly kept up, because every moment produces a new scene. Perhaps plans and drawings might give an exact idea of their composition; but what plan can show the order of that which is only perfect because destitute of all order? What drawing can produce the effect of things which seem so discordant; and how is it possible to introduce into it that life which the different objects borrow from one another?¹²

Van Braam may be thinking here of ideas found in the work of English architect William Chambers, who set off a craze for Chinese-style gardens a generation ago, publishing an influential book based on sketches he made as a youth in Canton. (It was difficult, Chambers wrote, to gather his materials “because the populace are very troublesome to strangers, throwing stones and offer[ing] other insults.”¹³) Chambers wrote that “nature is their pattern, and their aim is to imitate her in all her beautiful irregularities,” and he noted that attaining this sort of order in disorder was extremely difficult, “for though the precepts are simple and obvious, yet the putting them in execution requires genius, judgment, and experience; a strong imagination, and a thorough knowledge of the human mind,” because there were “as many variations as there are different arrangements in the works of the creation.”¹⁴

Guignes is less impressed. The Chinese don’t build things solidly, he says: in the 190 years since this garden was built, it’s already had to be rebuilt at least once. “Despite the care they take to paint the wood and the structures, the sun and rain destroy the painting quickly, and if a single year passes without repairs, that’s enough to wreck everything.”¹⁵ Still, he admits that it must have been beautiful at some point, the flowering bushes, the ponds and pavilions, the bridges and grottoes, the pebbled walkways zigzagging through parterres.

After this tour, they walk along the dike, looking down at the people preparing the fields for rice. Everywhere they look are prosperous-looking villages. This is the China they've been led to expect from the missionary accounts. "We were now, indeed, travelling through the richest parts of the Empire." And the people crowding around to gawk at them "are strangers to poverty," judging from their fine clothes.¹⁶ Unfortunately, the soldiers seem to enjoy hitting the locals. The Europeans ask them not to, but to no avail, and so the gentlemen cut short their walk.¹⁷

The winds are contrary, and the canal remains jammed, so they moor near Yangzhou for two more days, trapped in their cabins by the constant rain. At least the traffic is enjoyable to watch. Imperial rice barges are most numerous. Long and narrow, brightly painted and adorned with carvings, they're sometimes 100 feet long. They have priority over other vessels, but it's hard work maneuvering these heavy boats, and their crews of up to twenty often include convicts. The captains and pilots and their families live on them in stately looking cabins. The barges are rarely fully laden with rice, which enables the captains to supplement their meager incomes by taking on paying passengers and freight.¹⁸

Most vessels are smaller: cargo launches that load rice onto the barges, passenger boats, official's boats, and vessels carrying other things, such as one that's piled high with animal bones, which, they're told, are burnt for rice fertilizer.¹⁹ One boat has ten Koreans on it, who wave at Van Braam as if they know him. They run to a small launch and steer toward his boat. "We were," he writes, "utterly unable to understand one another. They then appeared to discover their mistake and were still more hurt when one of our mandarins ordered them to retire and to proceed on their journey."²⁰ Van Braam learns that they're victims of a shipwreck on their way to Beijing. Maybe, he thinks, they've been to Japan and met some Dutchmen there.

Eventually the canal clears, and they get underway. Before long, they reach the "throat of the Yangtze," where the Grand Canal crosses China's longest river. The water is more than a mile wide here. Tall green islands rise up from the sparkling water. As they cross the Yangtze, they pass close to the most beautiful isle: Golden Mount Island, whose trees shelter red-brick buildings with shiny green and yellow roofs. It's said that the White Snake Lady (白素貞) fought here against her rival, the tortoise spirit Fahai (法海), to recover her human lover. A stone quay wraps around the island, with bridges and walkways and white marble balustrades. Near the top, a tall tower rises above a cluster of buildings ensconced in trees.²¹ It's

brehtaking. “The whole composition,” Van Braam writes, “gives this place the appearance of one of those landscapes in which the painter has assembled all the objects most pleasing to the eye.”²² He makes two detailed sketches, with the intention of having them finished by a painter he employs in Canton. Even Guignes is charmed, making a sketch and noting that the beauty of Gold Mount Temple matches its name.

The canal on the other side is crowded, and the current is against them. The captains decide to stop and wait for the tide, so Guignes climbs a mountain and is rewarded with “the most beautiful view in the world.”²³ The vast river stretches out, with Gold Mount Island in the middle and the fortified town of Guazhou (瓜洲) squatting on the opposite bank.²⁴ On this side, tile roofs cluster below the massive walls of the fortress town of Zhenjiang (鎮江), behind which one can glimpse the city’s houses and gardens, as well as a tall tower. Around Zhenjiang stretch miles of fields dotted with houses and villages. On a nearby hill, people tend graves. Guignes stays for a long time to take it all in before descending and walking through narrow dirty streets back to the boats.²⁵



FIGURE 18. Jinshan Island. This painting, titled “Great Jinshan Palace” (大金山行宮), depicts the beautiful island that the travelers passed by when they crossed the Yangtze River by boat in March 1795. The anonymous Chinese artist may have based this painting on a sketch by A. E. van Braam Houckgeest.

Source: By anonymous Chinese artist, Canton, China. Watercolor and ink on paper, 1795–1796, in Albums of Paintings Commissioned by Andreas Everardus van Braam Houckgeest, Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, MA. Museum purchase, 1943, AE86344.44, no. 233.

When the tide turns, they float down the narrow canal. Zhenjiang's ramparts are bedecked in flags, and as they pass beneath, soldiers blow huge conch shells.²⁶ The sound makes Guignes uneasy, as do the overgrown walls and the bridges, which he fears will fall over.²⁷ The canal is busy. Crews in small boats dredge silt with large tonglike scoops, rowing it to shore, boatload by boatload.²⁸ How, Van Braam wonders, is this kind of maintenance economically feasible?²⁹ But this place is clearly wealthy and populous. An "inconceivable" number of people watch them float by, staring from bridges, windows, and doorways, the men often wearing glasses, the women painted with white and rouge. The women watch openly, flowers in their hair. When an official approaches them, the women go indoors, but they come right out again when he leaves.

The ladies of the lower Yangtze are famous for their beauty, and their bright white faces stand out from a hundred yards away. Telescopes allow a closer view: eyebrows penciled in with thin black lines, top lips painted dark red.³⁰ They look better from afar. "The color of their arms," Guignes writes, "is completely different from that of their face. They also all have terrible teeth, which probably comes from the tobacco they smoke."³¹ Van Braam finds their appearance unnatural, "more calculated to disgust than to please."³² He feels that makeup should be used sparingly, "in order that these secret arts, intended to make women appear more agreeable and fascinating in the eyes of their admirers, may not be betrayed by a ridiculous affectation."³³ At least most of the women aren't afraid to be seen, although the telescopes sometimes make people nervous.³⁴

Different areas have distinct styles. The ladies of Lücheng (呂城) wear a pearl dangling across the forehead, hanging from a band of dark leather that wraps around the head, which reminds Titsingh of "fall-hats" that mothers in Holland put on clumsy toddlers.³⁵ Guignes likes the style, which relieves the whiteness of their painted faces. "Nonetheless," he writes, "it's difficult ... to judge their color, because they put all kinds of rouge and white, and not separately, but mixed altogether, in such a way that some have a face that's entirely reddish."³⁶ Occasionally a particularly alluring woman appears, such as the mysterious beauty who stares down at them from behind a screen on the second floor of a pagoda. Guignes writes that she is "the most beautiful woman that we have seen to this point." More often, he's unimpressed. "The women are ugly. The men are better looking."³⁷

The travelers are also curious about the bound feet. At one point, Van Braam gets a chance to look at a pair up close:

A young person of 18 years extended to me the favor of examining her feet with close attention, and I can attest from this experience that neither the foot nor the leg is at all deformed or repulsive.... The foot that I saw, and which I touched in its nakedness, had nothing disagreeable about it. It was well-proportioned in all its parts, except for the fact that the little digits weren't visible because of the unnatural position that one had made them assume by means of the bending of which I've spoken.... I'm going into all these details because I believe it's possible that never before has the foot of a Chinese women been contemplated and examined by a foreigner.³⁸

He doesn't reveal how he managed this intimate meeting, or who the young person was.³⁹

The greatest beauties are said to live in Suzhou, one of China's most famous cities. Matteo Ricci, a Jesuit who traveled in China in the sixteenth century, referred to the city as heaven on earth, quoting a proverb: "What in heaven is called the seat of the blessed, on earth is Suzhou and Hangzhou."⁴⁰ He described it as more beautiful than Venice, because whereas the Italian city's canals are brackish and salty, Suzhou's are pure and clear.⁴¹

As Titsingh and the others approach the city, floating beneath dark, frosty skies, the canal banks get lower and the river traffic gets busier. Toward the evening of March 20, they float beneath Suzhou's first bridges, which are "equally noble and elegant—it would be impossible to build a handsomer."⁴² Like Venice, Suzhou's houses are often built right up against the water. Every window and doorway is full of onlookers, including lovely women. Even girls three or four years old wear painted faces.⁴³

The canals are packed, and boatmen scramble to make room for the Europeans to moor in front of a grand ceremonial gateway, where soldiers have set up checkpoints. It's a wise precaution, writes Van Braam, because "without it our vessels would have been sunk by the weight of those that would have crowded on board."⁴⁴ It's getting dark, so the travelers stay near their boats. In the morning, they'll go ashore for a banquet, with a full day for exploration.⁴⁵

Their day in Suzhou starts well. Sedan chairs are brought not just for Titsingh and Van Braam but also for Guignes and the other younger gentlemen, each of whom receives two bearers to carry him. (Titsingh and Van Braam each have four.) Guignes appreciates the attention and is eager to take part in a banquet, because to this point, he's only been invited to watch from the side with the servants, which is beneath his dignity. But now Van Braam has arranged for the younger gentlemen to be included, although not for Guignes's sake. He was only looking out for his nephew, Jacob Andries van

Braam.

They're borne through the city gates and along a narrow street "swarming with curious people."⁴⁶ Van Braam feels grateful for the soldiers stationed at each cross street, so "prodigious" are the crowds.⁴⁷ Yet the shops are small and pedestrian, and there are few women to be seen.

The government complex's wide courtyard is filled with soldiers and decorated with lanterns. At the back stands the emperor's letter, and as Van Braam and Titsingh move forward to kowtow, they glimpse tiny feet below a set of screens. Farther up, painted eyes peer through little glass windows.

It seems that the Europeans are once again on display. They play their roles, kowtowing, sitting at little tables, and politely tasting the fruit and meats served on bended knee, although they eat sparingly, because Titsingh has ordered his staff to prepare a European meal for later, "since we were not very set on Chinese cuisine."⁴⁸

Actors dressed as birds begin to flit about the stage, and the performances stretch on. One hour. Two hours. Finally, Titsingh gets up and tells the governor he'd like to see the sights of Suzhou.

The man replies that there's nothing worth seeing, and anyway the Europeans' meal is ready. He leads them to a courtyard, where tables have been set outside in the cold. Titsingh doesn't want to dine in full display, like an animal in a zoo, so the meal is moved to a neighboring room. Officials watch as they eat with knives and forks.

Titsingh asks again to see Suzhou. The governor says there's nothing worth seeing but that he will arrange something once dinner is over. Van Braam, the old China hand, explains to his companions that this is just how things are done in China:

It is a custom among the Chinese, as well as the other nations of the East, to depreciate every thing belonging to themselves, and to speak of it as something very common, at the same time that they lavish undeserved praise upon all that is shewn them by foreigners. We had heard so much said of Sou-tcheou-fou, which is a place of great celebrity, that we considered the Governor's answer as mere words of course, and during the whole of our repast were taken up with nothing but the idea of the interesting things we were about to see.⁴⁹

But they're disappointed. After dinner, they're carried through narrow and unremarkable streets to a small garden with a temple. It's dilapidated, and everything they see is "little deserving of our attention."⁵⁰ They climb the artificial hill, gaining a view of waterways filled with innumerable vessels, fields, towers, and

temples, but this garden seems far removed from the city's core.

They turn down the monks' invitation to tea, saying they want to move on to other sights, but to their surprise, their guides say there's nowhere to go. When Titsingh expresses his frustration, they say there is one more temple, but it's far away and inferior to this one. Van Braam hands the guides a list of tourist attractions. They raise objections to each one: too far, too decrepit, too difficult to get to.⁵¹

"And so," Titsingh writes, "we returned to our vessels in a bad mood."⁵² They feel even worse when they learn that their servants had a chance to walk through town and see beautiful stores and pretty women. They feel they're being rushed out of this famous city and wonder why. Maybe it's Wang Shiji's fault. He once worked as a salt merchant in Hangzhou, a city that comes later on their itinerary. He may be eager to get there soon to see his relations.⁵³ But as their boats sit in front of Suzhou for eight more hours, they hear that Wang Shiji has delayed their departure to purchase two Suzhou concubines.⁵⁴ Maybe he's celebrating his promotion.

Eventually the boats get underway, floating through beautiful fields of rapeseed, already in flower, and mulberry orchards, which remind Guignes of vineyards, because each tree has been pruned to three stubby limbs.⁵⁵ Pruning improves the quality of the leaves, providing better food for silkworms. The Province of Zhejiang, which they've now entered, is known for its silk, and the farther they go, the more mulberry trees they see.⁵⁶

In contrast to the dusty plains around Beijing, this is a land of plentiful water. Ditches and canals weave through the fields, emptying into thousands of lakes and ponds. Winter is the dry season, but farmers are preparing for the inundations of spring, and Van Braam notes that the crops—even the mulberry trees—are planted in raised beds "to carry off the water more speedily, and to preserve the land from damage."⁵⁷ The dead also need protection, placed in little houselike tombs on raised ground, except for the poor, whose coffins often lie out in the open. When the covers become dislodged, the bones are exposed, "a hideous spectacle." More recent dead give off an "unbearable stench."⁵⁸

They pass flourishing settlements: Wujiang (吳江), with formidable walls and extensive suburbs; Pingwangzhen (平望), a low-ranking town that Van Braam writes is nonetheless "a place so large and populous, filled with such beautiful houses, that many actual cities cannot be compared to it;"⁵⁹ Wanggangjing (旺岡涇), which barely makes it onto maps but has stone arches, beautiful houses, and factories for making gongs;⁶⁰ and Shimen Township (石門), another low-ranking but huge town, which spills over both sides of the canal.

These settlements—and many smaller ones—are equipped with extensive quays and bridges, and Van Braam notes that “the quantity of hewn stone employed in such places ... is truly surprising, when we know that the nearest place from which it can be procured is a hundred and fifty li distant, and sometimes more.”⁶¹

The country becomes hillier, with flowering peaches, orange trees, plum trees, pear trees, bare branched but blooming, all of which make for beautiful views.⁶²

They’re approaching Hangzhou, a city even more famous than Suzhou. Marco Polo called it the largest city in the world.⁶³ He told of its 12,000 bridges, its innumerable shops and marketplaces (“The merchants are so numerous and so rich, that their wealth can neither be told nor believed”⁶⁴), its tax revenues (“the most enormous amount of money that ever was heard of”⁶⁵), its huge pears and delicious peaches, its women, both those of “angelic beauty”⁶⁶ and those “of bad character,” who are “perfectly skilled in all the arts of seduction, which they can adapt to persons of every description, so that strangers who have once yielded to their fascination are said to be like men bewitched, and can never get rid of the impression.”⁶⁷ In the centuries after Marco Polo, Hangzhou was surpassed at times by other cities in China, but it didn’t lose its luster. The missionaries still call it one of the wealthiest and largest cities of China, with the most advantageous situation that could be desired, a prodigious number of inhabitants (more than a million souls), convenient canals, and the finest silk in the world. According to Du Halde, it lives up to its Chinese reputation as “the terrestrial paradise.”⁶⁸

Paradise glides into view on March 24, but it’s too late for a tour. They spend one last night in their lovely boats (they’ll receive new boats on the other side of the city) and then, in the morning, enter Hangzhou in grand procession. Even Guignes gets four porters. At first, the city is disappointing, with “narrow common streets,” but soon they’re passing through wide avenues with beautiful stores.⁶⁹ “Among others,” Van Braam writes, “to my great astonishment, I saw three watch-maker’s shops, and a great number of others full of smoked hams. It looked as if Westphalia was in China, and in the vicinity of this city.”⁷⁰ They pass an imposing mosque, with a Chinese-style roof and a huge arched gateway with an Arabic inscription: “Temple for Moslems who travel and wish to consult the Koran.”⁷¹ Spectators throng the streets, maintaining “a profound silence,” and at the cross streets, boisterous crowds push forward for a look.⁷² Women watch from doorways and windows and strategically placed palanquins.⁷³

It takes forty-five minutes to reach the Zhejiang governor’s offices,

its courtyards stuffed with soldiers and officials. The governor (巡撫) of Zhejiang Province, peacock feather in cap, greets them with his huge suite. Guignes likes him. He's "of a certain age" and has an agreeable face.⁷⁴ The gentlemen don't know that this man, Jiqing (吉慶), is a cousin of Heshen and thus related by marriage to the emperor himself (he will later become governor-general in Canton, where he'll allegedly commit suicide by swallowing a snuff bottle).⁷⁵ No wonder that, as Titsingh writes, "everything here was done with so much more grandness than in Suzhou."⁷⁶

Jiqing and suite lead them to a yellow canopy, where there are the usual kowtows and the reading of the emperor's letter, but as they sit down to eat, Jiqing leaves. This seems disrespectful. The governor at the last reception, in Suzhou, also got up and left, but this didn't happen at earlier receptions. Titsingh thinks he knows why: because now the younger gentlemen are participating, just as they did at Suzhou for the first time.⁷⁷ Van Braam has begun insisting on this, on behalf of his nephew, but these young men are far inferior in rank to a provincial governor, and this must be why Jiqing has left.

After just half an hour, Titsingh also stands up to leave, eager to see the sights. This time he's not disappointed. They're to be given a tour of Hangzhou's West Lake (西湖).

West Lake has been extolled by poets and painters for centuries, including the current emperor, who has visited several times and written numerous poems, renaming monuments and codifying its fourteen famous views, each of which is marked by a sign of engraved stone in the imperial hand. He and his father and grandfather loved West Lake so much that they used it as a model for gardens in Yuanmingyuan.

The park has been known in Europe ever since Marco Polo described it in the 1200s: "Full thirty miles in circuit, it's surrounded by beautiful palaces and houses, so wonderfully built that nothing can possibly surpass them."⁷⁸ He told about how one can ride on colorful pleasure barges, whose boatmen sit above, propelling the vessel with long poles. "The gratification derived from these water-excursions exceeds any that can be enjoyed on land, for as the lake extends all along the city, you discover, while standing in the boat, at a certain distance from the shore, all its grandeur and beauty, palaces, temples, convents, and gardens, while lofty trees reach down to the water's edge."⁷⁹ Four hundred years later, Du Halde's work described the beautiful temples, monasteries, and imperial palaces, the lotus blossoms floating on water "as limpid and clear as crystal, so that you may see the smallest stones at the bottom."⁸⁰

Many officials join today's excursion, despite the cold, dark weather, and since each brings his own suite of subordinates and attendants with umbrellas and servants, they form a huge procession as they pass through the city gate. They follow for a time the city's old, overgrown walls, and then, after a modest climb, see West Lake below them, dotted with tree-tufted islands covered with pavilions. Surrounding the lake are green mountains filled with villas, temples, and towers. "A charming scene," writes Titsingh.⁸¹

They walk along the northern bank beneath hills crowned by seven-story Baochu Pagoda and stop at a cluster of grand mausoleums set among pines and cypress trees.⁸² The most interesting one is a memorial to an official they've been hearing about for some time: Yue Fei (岳飛).⁸³ A brilliant young commander, Yue Fei fought against his dynasty's enemies, but just when he was on the brink of victory, a jealous rival named Qin Hui (秦檜) accused him of treason and convinced the emperor to execute him. It wasn't until decades later that Yue Fei was posthumously pardoned, and he became an exemplar of loyalty.

Across from his tomb are metal statues of the traitor Qin Hui and his wife kneeling, hands tied behind their backs. Her statue is headless. Titsingh and the others hit the statues, which is the custom. "Following the example of everyone who visited the grave," Titsingh writes, "we delivered a couple of blows to the head, face, and chest of the accusers. I took a stone as a souvenir."⁸⁴

Yue Fei's tomb is a major tourist draw, but today the Europeans are themselves an attraction. Fishers and sightseers maneuver their boats near shore to catch a glimpse of them. A group of ladies near Solitary Island, where one can enjoy the view "Still Lake, Autumn Moon" (平湖秋月), hobble over and try to peek into the palanquins but can't keep up because of their bound feet.⁸⁵

The travelers head across the lake via a mile-and-a-half-long causeway, which is interrupted occasionally by covered bridges, high and arched so that boats can pass beneath. The causeway itself is the subject of a famous view: "Spring Dawn at the Su Causeway (蘇堤春曉)," of which Van Braam has commissioned (or will commission) a painting.

When they reach the other side, they get out of their palanquins and climb Southern Mountain, whose slopes are covered with pavilions, artificial rocks, and winding paths. "This delightful variety," writes Van Braam, "produces a fascinating prospect. From the pavilions and domes placed here and there upon the declivity of the mountain, the eye commands a full view of the lake, and of the islands it contains; and on the other side, takes in the different

buildings, convents, tombs, and towers, which are scattered upon the flanks of other mountains, and which embellish their summits. So many objects united, compose the most attractive scene the imagination can conceive.”⁸⁶ This is one of the emperor’s favorite places, and his inscription stands here: Heaven in Miniature (小有天園). Guignes feels that this place would even live up to the emperor’s words if it were in better repair.



FIGURE 19. “Orioles Singing in the Willows” 西湖柳浪聞鶯, a famous view of Hangzhou’s West Lake (西湖). The travelers were deeply impressed by West Lake, one of the most famous tourist sites in China.

Source: By anonymous Chinese artist, Canton, China. Watercolor and ink on paper, 1790s, in *Albums of Paintings Commissioned by Andreas Everardus van Braam Houckgeest*, Courtesy of Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, MA. Museum purchase, 1943, AE86344.44, no. 53.

The travelers climb higher, stair after stone-hewn stair, and follow a steep trail to the summit, whose view is worth the climb. On one side is the lake and on the other the Qiantang River (錢塘江). Soon they’ll be sailing along those green shores filled with houses, tombs, and palaces where the emperor stays. “We would have paused a long time to examine this beautiful countryside,” Guignes writes, “but the cold north wind drove us down.”⁸⁷ It’s a confusing and difficult descent, the paths twisting among the rocks.

At Jingci Temple (淨慈寺), crowds of curious people follow as the head monk, dressed in gray and pink, shows the Europeans statues, towers, and hundreds of small figures, some of whom look to Guignes like Africans, “having, like them, curly hair and beards.”⁸⁸ They

disapprove of the icon of the current emperor, which Van Braam says reveals an “adulation greater than that inspired by the chiefs of other nations, and such as a wise Prince ought to reject.”⁸⁹ Guignes sees a material motive: “One can presume that this premature deification must attract the sovereign’s largesse, and indeed the pagoda and all of the buildings are perfectly well kept up.”⁹⁰



FIGURE 20. Bridge and boat on Hangzhou’s West Lake. “Bateau du Lac Syhou.” This engraving, probably from an original sketch by Guignes, depicts a scene from West Lake (西湖) in Hangzhou. Guignes was deeply impressed by his tour of this famous landscape, although he also could not shake a feeling of gloom.

Source: Chrétien-Louis-Joseph de Guignes, *Voyage à Péking, Manille et l’Île de France: faits dans l’intervalle des années 1784 à 1801*, vol. 4 (Atlas) (Paris: Treuttel & Würtz, 1808), plate 59. Public domain.

Their guides also show them the temple’s miraculous well. The priests place a candle on the end of a long bamboo pole and lower it to the bottom, where it illuminates a massive stump. They explain that the woodwork in this temple was made from this single tree, which stopped growing when the temple was finished. “The priests,” Guignes writes, “told us this fable with the best faith in the world, and we received it in the same way.”⁹¹

Not far from the temple stands Thunder Peak Tower (雷峰塔), built in the tenth century in memory of a princess.⁹² It’s famous in folklore as a place where the White Snake Lady was imprisoned by her terrapin enemy Fahai, and it figures in another famous view of West Lake: “Leifeng Sunset (雷峰夕照).”⁹³ Its exterior has been destroyed by war and weather, leaving just a mass of red brick interspersed with some brush.⁹⁴ The travelers go inside. The wooden beams and joists have long since disappeared, but Titsingh feels it will endure for centuries longer.

The number of things to see in West Lake seems inexhaustible and

exhausting. With the monks as their guides, they keep walking: another hill, another mausoleum, another beautiful view of the lake with its islands.

Yet Guignes can't shake a feeling of gloom. "One is affected here by a sentiment of melancholy. I can't say if the sensation that I felt came from the antique prospect of these places, or if it came from the effect of the dark weather, which spread an air of sadness on this multitude of pines that covered the mountains and surrounded the tombs, but the sentiment followed me for a long time."⁹⁵ He feels that Europeans would have made more of it: "If this country belonged to a European nation and if one had built pavilions and edifices of a more solid construction it would be the most beautiful countryside in the world, but all that the Chinese build falls in ruins in just a few years." He thinks the Chinese can't quite appreciate the beauty of nature: "They alienate themselves from nature by desiring to imitate it."⁹⁶

Van Braam has a different impression: "Almost everything in this picturesque situation is entirely the work of nature, and if she has sometimes borrowed the assistance of art, the efforts of the latter have been so happy, that it seems still as if nature has been working alone."⁹⁷ He fully endorses the beauty of West Lake. "It is not without reason," he writes, "that this lake and its environs are so renowned throughout the whole Chinese Empire; and most assuredly if nature had created such happy situations in Europe their beauties would be incessantly proclaimed."⁹⁸

He only wishes they had more time here. "It would require eight days, perhaps even double the time, to see and to admire all the beauties of the place, and to investigate everything attentively, so as to let neither situation, edifice, island, nor prospect escape and after all it would be impossible to avoid overlooking something or other."⁹⁹ Titsingh feels the same, writing that he and the others sit in their palanquins "complaining heartily to ourselves that we had no eight days to pass in this pleasant and enjoyable area in order to see everything with ease."¹⁰⁰ Guignes wishes he had a full month.¹⁰¹

But it's time to go. Late in the afternoon, they thank the friendly monks and climb back into their chairs to be carried southward through the beautiful mountains toward the riverbank. Everything is splendid. Silks flap from ceremonial arches, and lines of soldiers blow conches and shoot muskets, helmets shining and lances held high.

They've been treated so well here. Guignes thinks he knows why:

The ambassador's reception in Hangzhou was very good, from which one must conclude that it could have been the same everywhere. But in the places where we went, our primary Mandarin, a man who is very proud

and very stupid, took the place of the ambassador and had himself given honors that were not due to him. Since he was born in this place, and the son of a merchant, he didn't dare play the role of a man of importance here, which is why everything occurred with the greatest order here.¹⁰²

That may be so, although their reception may also be because Heshen's relative is governor here and has heard about how much the emperor and Heshen liked the Dutch.

In any case, it's time to leave the lower Yangtze—"heaven on earth"—and follow the Qiantang River through the Province of Zhejiang. They're eager to see their new boats.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

Zhejiang and Jiangxi

THE BOATS WAIT at the end of a vast muddy flat crowded with workers, who have placed 200 carts in a line to serve as a bridge over the muck. Buffalo riders plod alongside the palanquins, trying to peer inside.¹ Titsingh isn't happy with his boat. His last was large and had a special bedroom and a salon and rooms for servants, captain, and crew. This one is "very bad and small," with just one cramped cabin with built-in wooden beds.² There's another room in the front, but it's tiny, and the one in back is for the owner. Worst of all, there's no deck around the boat for the sailors to get from stern to bow, so they have to walk on top or pass through the main cabin.³ Only Guignes is happy. The boats are so petite that he finally gets his own.⁴

Why so small? The Qiantang River is shallow and filled with shoals. It's not nearly as navigable as the Yangtze and yet is a major artery, which will convey them from Hangzhou to the river port of Changshan (常山), 150 miles away, from which they'll march overland for a day before acquiring new boats in the Yangtze watershed. Conditions on the river can change rapidly, depending on rain and tide. Hangzhou Bay, where the river joins the sea, is a vast funnel, and when the swell comes in, it forms a powerful wave known as a bore tide, which an ancient poet described as "concentrated thunder on the surface of the sea, a waterfall exploding at the center of the river (海面雷霆聚, 江心瀑布横)." ⁵ It's a wonder to behold, especially during the mid-autumn festival, when people gather to enjoy the spectacle, careful not to be swept away by the massive waves as they

slam against the sea wall. It's possible to ride the tide in a boat, but it must be small, sturdy, and light.



MAP 6 Dutch embassy's journey by boat from Hangzhou, Zhejiang, to Canton, Guangdong.
Source: Cox Cartographic, Ltd.

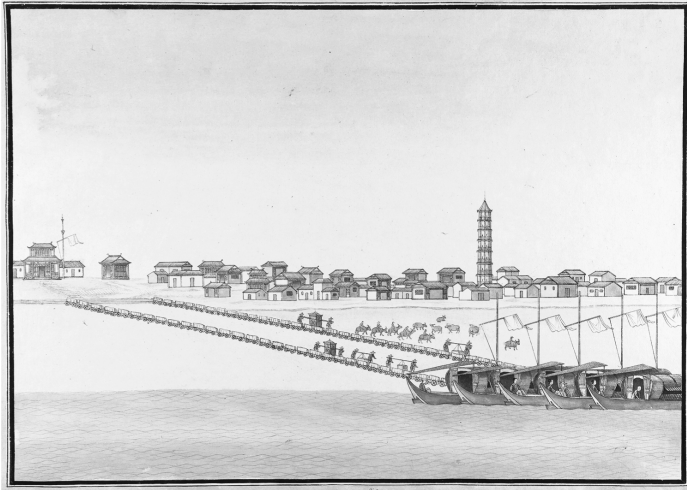


FIGURE 21. Embarking at the Qiantang River. “Vue de notre embarquement à Tsakhow, 25 mars.” This painting, commissioned by A. E. van Braam Houckgeest, depicts the muddy flat on the Qiantang River that Van Braam and Titsingh must cross to reach their boats. Carts have been placed to form a walkway. People on buffalos trot along, trying to catch a glimpse into the palanquins.

Source: Album of Chinese drawings and documents, BR 350, no. 46, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Florence, Italy. Reproduced by permission of the Ministero per i beni e le attività culturali e per il turismo / Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Firenze. Reproduction prohibited.

They have a chance to witness the bore tide this very evening. After a short jog on the wide river, lovely under the dark cloudy skies, they stop at Six Peace Tower (六和塔), which stands on a tall green hill. Apparently they must wait for Wang Shiji. While some gentlemen explore a nearby temple, the sailors start moving the boats into deeper waters, away from rocks and other boats. The tide roars in at six o'clock.⁶ “I was witness,” Van Braam writes, “to a phenomenon which in the whole course of my life I never saw before. ... [T]he water rushed suddenly in, and rose with a great deal of agitation.”⁷ It’s a weak tide by Hangzhou standards, which leads Van Braam to wonder what it’s like at its peak.

The boats return to their moorings and collect the walkers for their first night aboard. It’s not a good night. Conditions are constricted, and they aren’t used to living so close to the help. “When their meals are preparing,” writes Van Braam, “I am annoyed by the smoke, and by the abominable smell of the oil or grease with which they dress their victuals.”⁸

The next day they wait for Wang Shiji, becoming increasingly frustrated. Wang has sent word that they might receive a visit from the governor, so they can’t even explore or visit the monks in the

temple. Instead, they prepare their tiny boats to receive the governor, who never shows up. They suspect that Wang Shiji made the whole thing up to buy himself more time in Hangzhou:

A noise had been made that the Fou-yuen was supposed to come see the ambassador, and this is what made us return early [to the boats]. But he didn't come. It was an invention of our first Mandarin, whose father had been a merchant in this town and who managed, along with his son, to become a mandarin by means of money. He is the stupidest, vainest, and most ignorant person I've ever seen in my life. His family lives in the city and he came and stayed several days. Maybe this was to carry out commerce there, because he bought some watches and he needs some time to place them. He tells us all kinds of stories, to which we attach not the least credibility, in order to gain himself time.⁹

Eventually Titsingh goes out to tour the temple, but he's in a bad mood, and everything seems dreary. The buildings are neglected, the main one used as a lumber warehouse. The view from the tower is pleasant enough, but the weather is dark. After tea with monks, he returns to his boat.¹⁰ To think that they are confined here when they might have had another day in West Lake.

The following day Wang Shiji arrives, and their journey up the Qiantang begins. The light boats move fast, but the river wends and winds, and because the tow path runs up and down hills and over dilapidated bridges, the trackers are having a hard time. Van Braam blames their method. On the Grand Canal, the towers' individual lines all attached to a thick cable tied to the mast. Here, each tracker has his own thin line attached directly to the boat. To Van Braam, it seems inefficient. It's also an example of the baffling diversity of China:

This gives me occasion to reflect upon the little analogy that exists between the customs of the inhabitants of different provinces, so that one can hardly suppose them to belong to the same nation. There is scarcely a single point in which they can be said to agree. Language, dress, covering of the head, vessels, form of administration, agriculture, every thing, in a word, differs in each province. The language of the Mandarins is the only thing that is alike throughout the Empire; but from one province to another there is such a change of dialect, that our Canton servants found it very difficult to understand the language of the other parts of the country. Now if this dissonance is so perceptible in the seven provinces we have travelled through, it is probable that it exists in all the others.¹¹

Another peculiarity of this province is the way people row small boats with their feet and steer with their hands. The first time

Guignes sees this, he thinks the rower must be disabled and wonders why his boatmates don't try to help.¹² But no—it's just the river-folk's way.

The water is wide, and the travelers lash their boats together with the cooks' boats to dine while gazing at mountains, villages, people working in fields, children drying noodles on mats,¹³ and buffaloes staring from meadows beneath hills topped with pagodas.¹⁴ Yellow rapeseed flowers wave in valleys below hillside orchards of flowering peaches. In some places, the mountains step right down to the water, and there's no room for fields, just a few houses clustered around waterside warehouses, where small boats load wood. Where the mountains recede and give way to larger plains, there are picturesque towns: splendid Fuyang (富陽), with tall peaks behind it and whitewashed houses on a rocky hill sticking up above the walls; the village of Tangjiabu,¹⁵ nestled "among an infinite number of trees of all kinds."¹⁶

After the handsome town of Tonglu (桐廬), about forty miles from Hangzhou, the river narrows, and the current speeds up. Sometimes the water gets so shallow that the boats run aground, but they're made for this and are quickly dislodged, usually with no damage. It's hard work, and the trackers must constantly readjust their cables.

At the place called Three River Mouths (三江口), the Qiantang River, now called the Fuchun River (富春江), meets two tributaries, each of which has its own name. A walled city stands here—Yanzhou Prefecture (嚴州)¹⁷—below dramatic mountains. The travelers sail up the southern tributary, the Orchid River (蘭江), thunder rumbling in the distance. It's mountainous, but farmers have etched terraced plantations into the inclines, which Van Braam finds very pleasing.¹⁸ Where the river bends, fertile valleys create a sense of variety that Titsingh enjoys.¹⁹

Every inch of arable land seems to be tilled in neat checkerboard squares. "Thus," Van Braam writes, "do the Chinese prove, in every part of the Empire, that they are no way inferior to the Europeans in the art of agriculture."²⁰ Indeed, he writes, Europeans only recently began improving their agricultural practices, and with indifferent success:

[The Chinese] have at the same time the advantage of being able to boast that they carried that art to the perfection at which it is now arrived, whole centuries ago, while it is only within these few years that any nation among us has thought of improving ancient methods, and even that with little success, because the farmers, slaves to habit, and to the example of their forefathers, adhere with obstinacy to the old routine. In vain is it

demonstrated to them that certain changes are advantageous, either in the practice of agriculture or in the treatment of cattle. This is a thing of which they cannot be persuaded.²¹

It's gratifying for Van Braam to see what he's read about from earlier observers, such as Du Halde, who describes at length China's flourishing paddies, "there being not an Inch of arable Land, but what is cover'd with fine Rice, the Chinese having been industrious enough to level all the unequal places that are capable of Culture."²² Du Halde and others felt that China's agricultural productivity was fostered by wise government, as symbolized in the emperor's yearly ploughing ritual, in which "the Emperor (according to the Custom of the antient Founders of this ceremony of excellent Monarchy) goes himself in a solemn manner to plough a few Ridges of Land, in order to animate the Husbandmen by his own Example, and the Mandarins of every City perform the ceremony."²³ Some European princes emulated this example.²⁴

Van Braam sees himself as an ambassador for Chinese agriculture, although he complains that he's not been able to persuade other Westerners to follow his example.²⁵ He hopes that after his return to the West, he'll be able to spread China's agricultural knowledge and also its engineering prowess. For instance, the water-turned rice mills here are constructed in a way that "does honour to the genius of the Chinese."²⁶

Nonetheless, he can't really believe that these wheat fields will really yield not just a harvest of wheat but two more harvests of rice: three crops per year on the same land. On reflection, he decides it must be true, because the wheat is already so high that it will be harvestable within a month, before summer's even arrived. How different these areas are from the "poor and wretched" places they passed en route to Beijing!²⁷ He finds it astonishing that the rulers of China decided to make their capitals in the north rather than the south.

Fine wheat and rice are not all these prosperous lands produce. At Lanxi (蘭谿), the gentlemen sample the famous Jinhua Ham (金華火腿), with its rich dark red meat and delicate white fat. The meat is delicious, although the city looks sad, with its ruined tower on a crumbling cliff.

Their voyage through the Qiantang watershed ends on April 4, when they arrive at the riverfront of Changshan City (常山), which is packed with vessels shiny from rain. Soldiers play music and fire salutes. Hundreds of umbrellas bob above the crowds that press forward in front of the colorful tents and pavilions, all of which

creates, for Titsingh, “an oddly bewitching atmosphere.”²⁸ They’ll stay aboard these “awful boats” one last night, and then, tomorrow, trek twenty-six miles overland to Yushan (玉山) to board new boats, which, they’re told, will be much better.²⁹

But in the morning, Titsingh says it’s too dark, cold, and rainy. He wants to stay in his boat until the weather changes. Van Braam persuades him to change his mind, and soon they’re being carried through the crowds. Guignes and his traveling companion are on a blind horse and a lame one, which angers Guignes, because he’s certain that the better horses have been commandeered by an official. He retaliates. “We took two horses that had been intended for our minor mandarins and just left.”³⁰ Children chase for a time, yelling.

Soon the weather clears, and Titsingh gets out and walks on the wide, pebbled road, which rises gently, bordered by wild roses, and then winds through fields of wheat, barley, turnips, peas, hemp, and yellow rapeseed flowers.³¹ Mountain streams murmur beneath bridges. Guignes’s companion is thrown into a flooded rice paddy when his horse trips, but he’s fine, and the views are gorgeous. “No true aficionado of agriculture,” Van Braam writes, “could ask for more beautiful scenes than those on offer here at each instant in this valley, with its many hamlets and villages, its trees of different species, its fragrant groves.”³² Each village has covered depots to shelter goods and people from the rain, which demonstrates to Van Braam the excellent public order of China.

Around midday, they stop for their final taste of Zhejiang—tea near Caoping Station (草平驛)—and then pass through the gateway to Jiangxi Province. Now the road descends, crossing a swiftly flowing river via a steep stone bridge. Van Braam reflects that these very waters will flow into the great valley that they traversed on their voyage to Beijing, and through which they’ll soon be traveling on their way back.³³

They make it to Yushan just as the rain starts. The city’s not much to look at, small, with squat stone walls; poor, small houses; and meager shops, but the lodging is large and good.³⁴ Typically used by traveling merchants, it also housed Lord Macartney last year.

They have a chance to explore the following day, while the boats are being loaded. The crowds are “beyond all imagining,” but calm.³⁵ The most interesting thing they find is steaming blood and chicken feathers in a temple, vestiges of a sacrifice. Guignes wishes they’d arrived just a bit earlier.³⁶ “It was the first time I had heard anyone speak of a blood sacrifice.”³⁷ Van Braam is also intrigued, because, he notes, usually Chinese offer food to their idols, which they then eat.³⁸ But when they tell Titsingh, he says he’s not surprised: “The

slaughtering of a chicken and the saying of oaths by Chinese in front of the court of justice in Batavia is a longstanding practice.”³⁹

At one point, Guignes has a chance to show Wang Shiji how little he thinks of him. Wang is returning from a meeting with local officials in a grand procession: “He was preceded by soldiers, executioners, torturers, and people in chains.... He was very proud of all this respectable paraphernalia and thought we would stop to salute him, but we continued along our route without even looking at him.”⁴⁰

The new boats live up to expectations. “I was,” Titsingh writes, “as content with the new boat as I had been discontent with the old bad one. It is very large and capacious, with two good rooms.”⁴¹ Guignes finds the boats smaller than the ones they had on the Grand Canal, which he says is due to the greed of the officials, “who are always trying to make economies for their own profit.” He chooses one of the smallest ones so he has a chance of being alone again.⁴² Van Braam loves the windows in his cabin, which allow him to enjoy the beautiful views despite the incessant rain.⁴³

The current carries them past villages, forests of fir trees, water mills, fields and orchards, and paddies. Sometimes the rain is so intense that they have to stop, as at Hekou (河口), whose houses are built of red stone; and Yiyang (弋陽), where a thunderstorm hurls hail against their boats;⁴⁴ and Ouang-kia-pou, where the birds chitter in the dense forest as the rain rattles against the roof.⁴⁵

After Guixi (貴溪), the land opens up and becomes flatter, and the current slows. Guignes wants to go faster and blames Wang Shiji. “The boat crews received an order to go slowly and not to pass the boat of our first Mandarin. This Chinese believes his dignity is compromised if one of our boats goes faster than his. He even had the captain of the ambassador’s boat given some blows with a bamboo because he did not execute his orders. Since this point, he kept in the rear, and the other boats did not dare to go as fast as they usually did.”⁴⁶

As they enter the Poyang Plain, the flat land expands on all sides, filled with lakes and canals and flooded fields. Soon, the lake itself comes into view, stretching as far as the eye can see.⁴⁷ Here they lose the current, and the crews must pole against the wind. Eventually, they are poling up one of the innumerable tributaries toward Nanchang.

The sun peeks through the clouds, and Van Braam hears the “messenger of springtime,” the lark, which makes him think of his homeland, bringing him joy and sorrow: “Oh my dear country! What will become of you? War and its thunders threaten you with

destruction! What perils are surrounding you? Can you promise victory? And if you should succumb, who can predict your destiny?"⁴⁸ He doesn't yet know that his country has already succumbed, that in January, while he was meeting the emperor and having banquets in the Forbidden City, French troops marched across frozen rivers into Amsterdam, and the Regent of the Netherlands—the person Van Braam and Titsingh are representing here in China—fled in a fishing boat to London. He doesn't realize that the United Provinces is now the Batavian Republic, a French client state.

He and his companions float unaware through an unending expanse of flooded rice paddy, nary a tree in sight, and then they arrive at Nanchang Prefecture, where they had begun their winter walk to Beijing. The waterways here are teeming with vessels, many made right here, judging from the wharves and drydocks. From quays and windows, spectators watch as they disembark at a large, decorated pavilion, while soldiers fire salutes, and are then carried into the narrow, dirty streets, a company of soldiers to protect them.

Before, they were in a rush. Now, as favorites of the emperor, they have a chance to explore. The city is, Van Braam writes, "extremely extensive, very populous, and entirely devoted to commerce."⁴⁹ Guignes wants to buy some things, and although he doesn't have much money, he's encouraged to see that many stores sell cheap items: straw hats, fans, costumes and props for actors. When he enters a shop, the proprietor runs away, and he and his friends burst into laughter. Soldiers bring the man back, trembling and pale. "He recovered very quickly from his fright and tried to cheat us," Guignes writes. "We didn't fall into the trap."⁵⁰ Guignes feels that this whole city is overpriced. When he tries to buy some porcelain, for instance, the merchant asks much more than he might pay in Canton, and it doesn't even look like Cantonese wares.

But Van Braam knows value when he sees it. Here one can buy wares made in Jingdezhen (景德), a city located on the other side of Lake Poyang, which produces the best porcelain in the world. In warehouses near the riverbank, Van Braam finds wares "more beautiful than anything that I'd seen in Canton, although fabricated solely according to the Chinese fashion and taste. I couldn't resist the desire to buy a grand quantity of beautiful and unique pieces, to serve as a souvenir of my visit to this city."⁵¹ He also buys a Chinese-style wheelbarrow.⁵²

The following morning, he meets another collector, kindly, gray-haired Chen Huai (陳淮), governor (巡撫) of Jiangxi Province. Chen Huai possesses one of one of the finest collections of art and calligraphy in China.⁵³ Unfortunately, he'll soon lose it. In a few

years, he'll be fired and his fortune seized by the Qing court.⁵⁴ It seems that he reserves most of his money for art rather than banquets for foreign guests. Titsingh writes, "The reception, the theater, the clothing of the performers, and the hall itself were all less grand than had been the case at the previous celebrations."⁵⁵ Titsingh does appreciate the two cranes that strut in front of the theater, tall and white, with black wing- and tail-feathers and a beautiful red crown. He's only seen them in paintings, where they symbolize longevity. It's a thrill to see them in real life.⁵⁶

Titsingh knows by now that he needn't stay for the entire long performance, so after a half hour, he excuses himself. Since it's raining and there doesn't seem to be much to see in Nanchang, he says goodbye and heads back through the muddy streets to the vessels for the trip up the Gan River.

With a good wind behind them, they head upriver, tracing their route in reverse. Fengcheng (豐城), Tazhou (潯州), Xin'gan (新淦), Jishui (吉水). Last time, it was December and cold, but now the thermometer climbs into the nineties, which brings new challenges. Near Ji'an (吉安) Prefecture, their provisions spoil, and they have to wait for new animals to be slaughtered, but they're allowed to walk as they please, so they look at the nice houses, "one of which could even be called beautiful," and watch the locals use urine to make bamboo rope.⁵⁷ The pee, Van Braam notes, "adds more beauty and durability to the bamboo."⁵⁸

This freedom to walk around is a blessing, and a contrast to Macartney's treatment: "Last year, not a single member of the English embassy enjoyed such permission, and given how much pleasure it provides us during our voyage, it must have appeared quite shocking for them not to have enjoyed it."⁵⁹

The countryside of Jiangxi is beautiful, although many cities seem neglected and impoverished, especially the ones with walls and designations as prefectural or county seats. Smaller settlements, which cluster everywhere along the riverbanks, seem better off, shaded by dense trees and visited by many boats.⁶⁰

The river doesn't just carry vessels. Sometimes they see dead bodies drifting downstream, and once, Guignes sees dogs eating a corpse washed up on the river bank.⁶¹ It's a dangerous river. As they approach Taihe County (泰和) on a stormy late April evening, the boat carrying Van Braam's and Guignes's baggage is breached. The sailors unload what they can, but the vessel sinks. In the morning, divers recover the rest of the things, which seem not to have been damaged by the water.⁶²

The farther upriver they go, the more dangerous it gets, as the

river gets shallower and the mountains encroach. Just before they enter the dreaded passage with the Eighteen Shoals, another corpse floats downstream. When they passed through this area on their way to Beijing, the current was with them and the water was low, meaning that the rocks were visible. This time, the current is against them and the water is high and swift, so although some rocks still break the surface with a rushing sound, most are concealed. To make matters worse, the tow paths are slick with oily silt, so the trackers slip and slide, struggling to ford the streams that constantly cross the path. Sometimes they have to swim, but not all know how, so they climb into the boats, leaving more work for their comrades. The temperature climbs to ninety-six degrees Fahrenheit, and the exhausted men strip, shocking Guignes: "The indecency of these people is revolting. They ... continued to pull the boats while being completely naked, not worrying at all if they passed in front of houses or in front of women."⁶³

Last time they made it through the gorge in a few hours. This time it takes two days. But finally, they spot the bright white Tower of Yuhong (玉虹塔), where the Gan and Zhang Rivers converge. Ganzhou City stands a bit farther up, on the land between the two rivers, its "magnificent stone quay" crowded with hundreds of vessels.⁶⁴ Through the misty rain, Ciyun Tower (慈雲塔) rises above the walls, recognizable from plates in European travel books, its top looking to Guignes like "an old Chinese peasant hat."⁶⁵

Here the travelers join the Zhang River, which they'll follow for a hundred sinuous miles to Nan'an, where they'll leave their boats behind and hike up through the Meiling Pass and into Guangdong Province.

The Zhang River's banks are filled with spring roses, blackberries, honeysuckle, and lilac. "Nowhere on earth," Van Braam writes, "is there a place decorated in such a rich and delightful manner."⁶⁶ Water cascades from the mountains and transports Van Braam into reverie. He knows he's being excessive but asks his readers to indulge him: "If one were able to provide a true-to-life picture of this part of the country, it would doubtless seem to be nothing more than the product of a romanesque imagination. Although I tried to master my own imagination, I was nearly led to believe that we were traveling along the enchanted banks of a new Cythera."⁶⁷ Yet here he balks against his imagination: This can't be a new Cythera because the original island of Cythera was home to Eros and his mother, Aphrodite, god and goddess of romantic love, a phenomenon he feels is lacking in China. Although the Chinese "adore sensuality, and with pomp," they don't understand true romantic love:

I have never known a Chinese who had the least notion of the sweet charms of love.... Without doubt, the Chinese feel the sort of passion that brings the sexes together, and nature certainly has them observe its laws. But according to their own avowals, an instinct that it is necessary to call “animal” is their unique impetus, and a Chinese man, once this instinct is satisfied, doesn’t have need to wait for his heart to return, because he doesn’t know how to pour it out into another person.⁶⁸

The Chinese man only knows one desire, unaware that “there are a thousand other desires beyond it, which can be created by the true union of two souls.”⁶⁹ Van Braam finds this a terrible pity, particularly because it deprives Chinese men of the reforming influence of women. Even worse, he feels that Chinese women suffer. The man, uninterested in romantic love, focuses his animal passions on making children and feels no particular attachment to his wife or concubines. Women, tasked with the maintenance of the household, are reduced, he says to the status of slaves, “who wait on the orders of a despot whose heart is inaccessible to any feeling [*sensibilité*].” No, he writes, “to my mind there is no place on earth where women are more unfortunate than China.”⁷⁰

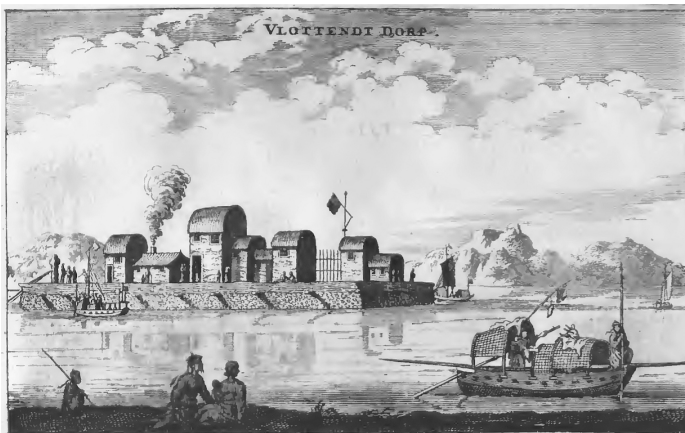


FIGURE 22. Floating town. “Vlottendt Dorp.” This engraving of a floating town is based on a drawing by Johan Nieuwhof, who accompanied a Dutch embassy to Beijing in the 1650s. A. E. van Braam Houckgeest brought a copy of Nieuwhof’s famous book when he traveled to and from Beijing in the 1790s and enjoyed comparing the earlier traveler’s experiences to his own. Source: From Johan Nieuwhof, *Het Gezantschap der Neêrlandsche Oost-Indische Compagnie, aan den grooten Tartarischen Cham, den tegenwoordigen Keizer van China* (Meurs, Dutch Republic: Jacob van Meurs, 1665), p. 125. Public domain.

The other members of the expedition aren’t so transported by the beauties of this land but do enjoy the “delightful views,” the

“luxuriant fields,” “the hedges of roses and other flower trees, whose variegated colors made this scene even more beautiful.”⁷¹

Another pleasure is to see the huge wood rafts depicted in the famous book by Johan Nieuhof, who called them “floating towns.” These structures, Niehof wrote, “are so cleverly and artfully constructed that the cleverest Europeans would find it difficult to put together rafts like this with the same materials and so well and artfully.”⁷² The plate in Nieuhof’s book shows a sort of walled village packed with houses, with a chimney belching smoke. The rafts here in the Zhang River don’t seem quite so elaborate, but they’re big: 100 to 150 feet wide. They have houses built on them, with proper doors and windows and roofs, and between the houses is a roofed courtyard with a wall and a gate, which serves the residents as a common area. A smaller house to the side serves as a kitchen.⁷³

These behemoths are not easy to maneuver, and there are accidents. On April 30, after passing Nankang (南康), Titsingh’s boat tries to dodge a raft and runs against a stake, filling with water. The crew beaches it on a sandbar and works in the stifling sun, unloading the cargo, pumping out the water, and repairing the hole. Many of Titsingh’s things are soaked through.⁷⁴ Two other boats in the fleet also strike stakes, one of which sinks to the bottom.⁷⁵

Another raft disaster strikes just as they’re about to leave the Zhang River, at the city of Nan’an. Lightning flashes through the darkness, lighting up the city’s decrepit stilt houses, and officials advise them to sleep on shore, but the gentlemen don’t want to, preferring the known comfort of their boats.⁷⁶ In the middle of the night, they’re awakened by a roar.⁷⁷ They spring to the windows to find the river has become a violent jumble of logs, which tumble downstream from a destroyed lumber raft. The gentlemen’s boats are closely moored to the quayside and avoid disaster, but the vessel with Titsingh’s cooks is swept away, along with other boats. At least there’s free firewood. Everyone fishes out as much as possible, while the poor wood-tenders rush downstream on small rafts. Fortunately, Titsingh’s cooks make it back overland.

This time, they march up the Meiling Pass from the other direction, passing the city walls and following dikes through fields of rice. The road is steep, and although Titsingh feels bad for the porters, he enjoys the view of “the swarm of people climbing up and down, following all the windings of the path, looking from below like a line of ants.”⁷⁸ Van Braam’s porters are relieved when he climbs out of his palanquin “to contemplate at my leisure the magnificent views that the valleys offer—the effect is extraordinary: nearly every bit of land is planted with rice and tobacco, forming in this way a wide

green carpet from which there rise an immense quantity of trees.”⁷⁹ Guignes surveys from horseback. For once he’s pleased with his steed, an official post horse. He keeps it at a trot in order not to tire out the soldiers who jog along on foot.⁸⁰

By midday, they reach the top, where Meiling Gate, entrance to Guangdong, seems small and plain against the mountain pass. Soldiers fire a salute as they travelers leave Jiangxi Province.

The walk down is more gradual, and there’s tea in a temple and time to sketch statues.⁸¹ In late afternoon, the towers of Nanxiong appear, and soon the travelers are passing between lines of soldiers firing salutes. Titsingh finds the lodging here “the most beautiful that we’ve yet had.”⁸²

The magistrate personally takes them to two local temples, warning that “they’re not in brilliant condition.”⁸³ The first has a crumbling tower, sugar drying in the courtyards, and halls filled with lime and pebbles to make mortar, although a statue of the “Laughing Buddha (笑佛)”⁸⁴ seems to receive attention: Its brass belly is shiny “from all the rubbing that women did to him when they came to ask for children.”⁸⁵ In another hall stands a much larger statue, which they’re told is also made of bronze, but Guignes is skeptical: when no one’s looking, he sticks his cane through the iron grillwork and raps it, which convinces him that it’s really made of wood, a fact he proudly recounts in his diary.⁸⁶ The second temple is a temple to Confucius that reminds them of the emperor’s palaces in Beijing, with a grand entrance gate and three courtyards with halls. The main hall has lofty ceilings and a large image of a youthful Confucius with a pale face and a lavish beard.⁸⁷ Pictures of his students stand nearby, all with smiling faces. The stuffy air suggests that they’re not as well loved as the laughing Buddha.⁸⁸ Guignes likes the magistrate, noting that he has two thumbs on one hand.⁸⁹

Guignes and the younger gentlemen make sure that the boats are acceptable, switching the nameplates so that Titsingh gets the best one and Wang doesn’t, and demanding lighter and more comfortable ones for themselves.⁹⁰ Titsingh likes his boat, which is decorated with red silk and dragons. It has a large main cabin with four windows on each side, a bedroom, and a room for his servants.⁹¹

It’s all downstream now, and they make quick progress. The landscape is familiar but greener. “The red roses,” Van Braam writes, “have abandoned us ever since we left Jiangxi Province but the little white roses and the other flowers continue to accompany us, beautifying the two sides of the river.”⁹² Some views exhaust his capacity as an author. Trees growing out of a hollow in a rock looking over a small valley is a scene “so extraordinary that the pen

can't try to paint it, and there's no kind of art whatsoever capable of producing an imitation of the beauties that nature has enriched it with."⁹³

Past the river port of Shaozhou, the famous mountain spires of Guangdong Province appear, vertical pillars of rock, which, Van Braam writes, "inspire a sort of terror."⁹⁴

Usually they sail past, but one deserves a visit. From afar, it's much like the others: a tall cliff of gray rock whose top seems to hang out over the river. As they get closer, however, a structure appears, set into the rock face, tiny against the vast surface. Guignes feels that it has "a disagreeable effect on the eye."⁹⁵ Their boat hands start banging on gongs. Skinny monks emerge from the cliff and row toward them. They invite the travelers to visit their home, the Guanyin Cliff Temple (觀音岩).

The travelers climb in the monks' boats and are taken to jagged crevice at the base of the cliff. The limestone has been hewn away to form a large, comfortable space where, to one side, a guard watches from a little room, overseeing a trunk for donations. Hewn stairs lead up—Van Braam counts forty-four—to a hall behind which is a cave-dormitory for the five monks who live here. Another thirty-two stairs take them up to the temple itself, where golden Guanyin sits in a niche, "sculpted most prettily."⁹⁶

This area is open to the air but sheltered by an overhanging rock that trickles with water. The outcropping looks like a lotus flower, which is what inspired the founders of this temple to place Guanyin here, the lotus being a symbol of Buddhism.⁹⁷ Titsingh stands at the stone-carved railing and looks down at the river, surprised at how high up he is. "One has here," he writes, "the most beautiful view to the east and south over the surrounding area."⁹⁸

The walls of the temple are covered with inscriptions. An anonymous Chinese account of the Dutch mission notes, "Men of letters who enter into this cavern invariably write a few lines, such that it is entirely covered with these sentences. The ambassador and deputy ambassador who are delighted and ravished with joy at seeing this place, add their own inscriptions."⁹⁹ Titsingh doesn't mention writing anything in the temple, but Van Braam says he adds his signature to a book filled with the names of visitors.¹⁰⁰

As they leave Guanyin Cliff behind, Van Braam makes a detailed sketch. He finds it less impressive than other attractions he's seen, because here "art has had more to contribute than nature."¹⁰¹ His sketch is quite different from the painting he has commissioned of this place from one of his painters in Canton: solid and substantial, whereas the painting feels more ephemeral, almost unstable.¹⁰²

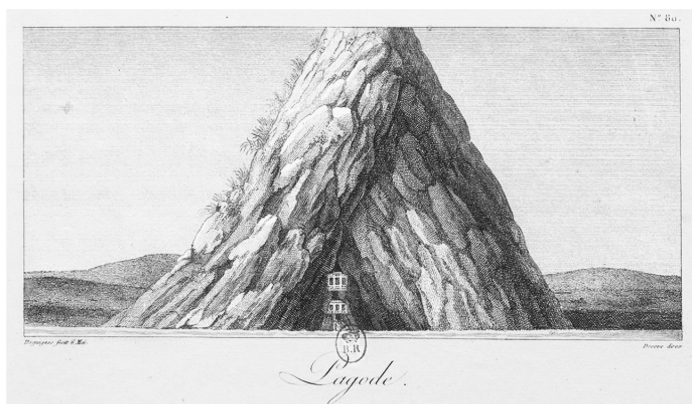


FIGURE 23. View of Guanyin Temple. “Pagode.” This view of the Guanyin Temple (觀音岩) near Yingde (英德) is probably based on an original sketch by Guignes.

Source: Chrétien-Louis-Joseph de Guignes, *Voyage à Péking, Manille et l’île de France: faits dans l’intervalle des années 1784 à 1801*, vol. 4 (Atlas) (Paris: Treuttel & Würtz, 1808), plate 80. Public domain.

After the temple, they speed downriver, past fields, mills, terraced mountain paddies, narrow passages with waterfalls, frightening cliffs, massive wood rafts, fishermen with strange nets, a ruined tower with a tree growing out of the top, and soldiers in rowboats blowing horns.

Their voyage is nearly over, and they’ve been fortunate, keeping their health and avoiding serious accidents. Unfortunately, the night before they reach Canton, luck runs out for one of the party. A servant of Van Braam’s, a boy named Jean Sperie, steps from Van Braam’s vessel toward the cooks’ boat and falls into the river.¹⁰³ It’s the second time today he’s fallen when crossing from one boat to another, but this time it’s dark and the current is intense. They search and search but can’t find him. Ultimately, they conclude that he was “carried away by the violence of the current.”¹⁰⁴ As lightning flashes in the night sky, they reflect on the loss. He was just fourteen, “the age of the liveliest hopes,” and a delightful boy, funny, a good singer, an eager participant in concerts in Canton and Macau.¹⁰⁵ “What can we do,” Van Braam asks, “in our feebleness against the manner in which the imperious course of fate plays with our plans? We can do nothing but bend ourselves beneath it without complaint.”¹⁰⁶

In China, fate is often wet, and its scars are everywhere. At Sanshui, where they dock for dinner, there was once a grand palace for traveling officials, but floods swept it away last year. All that’s left is the grand entranceway, part of a hall, and a stage where dramas were once performed. Sad stairs descend into the water.¹⁰⁷

The next morning, Titsingh unwittingly throws counterfeit coins to poor boys and then begins the final day's journey. He and the others are particularly interested in seeing Foshan (佛山), a city just fifteen miles from Canton but off limits to Europeans. Its mysterious markets are the source of many of the valuable goods the Europeans crave.¹⁰⁸ On their way to Beijing, they passed it at night, but today they expect to have plenty of time. Then they're stopped by a sandbar, which won't be passable until the tide comes in at sundown. They're disappointed until someone points out that Titsingh's boat is lighter and flatter than the usual Pearl River transport craft.¹⁰⁹ The sailors think they might be able to pull it over the sandbar. Van Braam and the other gentlemen (except for Guignes, who has fallen behind) cross over to Titsingh's boat (quite carefully, we can imagine), and then the sailors heave it over the shoal.

Soon they're floating toward Foshan, past fields of hemp, orchards of mulberry, and "superb villages with beautiful brick houses, some of two or three stories."¹¹⁰ The farther they go, the more crowded it gets, and in some places, there's barely any space to squeeze through.

The vessels that take up the most space are rice transport rafts, which can be hundreds of feet long. On them are built scores of tall rice silos, watchtowers for security, and houses, because entire families live on them. Once they sell the rice in Foshan, they'll dismantle the raft, sell the wood and bamboo, and return upriver to start the cycle again next year.

Foshan is worth the effort: prosperous houses with waterfront verandas adorned with colorful flowerpots and little trees; temples; factories; kilns; and customs houses—two of them, the second one particularly large and beautiful. Van Braam estimates that Foshan stretches for around nine miles.¹¹¹ And its reputation seems deserved. Its quays are bustling with all manner of craft, from merchant boats to pleasure vessels filled with "filles publiques," who come out on deck and watch them pass.¹¹² Van Braam thinks it's just as prosperous as Canton itself.¹¹³

Past a huge temple, they moor near a large triple gateway, which Van Braam is delighted to recognize from one of his paintings: "One can understand my joy when I saw that the drawing of Fo-chan that I have in my collection has an extreme fidelity, because I can naturally conclude that the other paintings have the same exactitude!"¹¹⁴ He wants to go ashore and have a look, but then a storm begins dumping rain. The cooks prepare supper, while the gentlemen watch the incessant stream of vessels, including some ammunition barges that make Titsingh nervous: "The negligence of the people on these vessels was unfathomable: Powder balls stood piled up on the front

and the back, and yet one saw them wandering through with their pipe lit.”¹¹⁵

After a meal, they sail to Flowerland, the park they visited on the way to Beijing, thinking they’ll spend the night, but Hang merchants meet them there and say they should speed back to their lodge in Canton, because officials have prepared a celebration.

They get underway right away but don’t arrive until well after midnight, by which time the officials have gone home, so they disembark in the darkness, with no soldiers or musicians to greet them.

It doesn’t matter. They’re happy to be back and raise glasses in the lodge, “offering each other congratulations on the accomplishment of this important voyage, which forms a remarkable epoch in the lives of each of us.”¹¹⁶ It’s not a good time to think about all the work to be done or all the things that happened during their time away: how a thief smashed a window and broke into Van Braam’s apartment;¹¹⁷ how a storm broke hundreds of windows;¹¹⁸ how fights broke out between British and Dutch officers;¹¹⁹ how Dutch ships had to sail with skeleton crews because Chinese sailors got drunk and ran away on New Year’s day.¹²⁰

For now, it’s time to thank God, who, as Van Braam puts it, “protected me and saw me back to my peaceful lodge without harm.”¹²¹ “The joy of being back,” Titsingh writes, “was shared by all, and we had the greatest reason to thank God that this difficult journey had been completed in health, despite all of the tribulations.”¹²²

Yet God has new tribulations in store. During their voyage, the world changed, and none of the travelers will follow an easy path into the future.

CHAPTER TWENTY

An Uncertain Future

THE MORNING AFTER THEIR RETURN, soldiers fire salutes and beat gongs as the gentlemen are picked up by imperial vessels, banners flying under the bright sun.¹ Viceroy Changlin is waiting for them at the Haizhuang Temple, attentive and affectionate. They're led to understand that he returned from a war expedition expressly to welcome them back.² He makes clear how pleased he is to learn that the emperor was so delighted with the embassy. He serves them herbal infusions and fine tea, until gongs and horns announce the emperor's letter, which is soon carried into the temple by a parade of men clad in yellow and carrying long staves.

Everyone kowtows and listens on his knees as it's read out loud, the same letter that's been read throughout their voyage from Beijing. Afterward there are presents of silk and cups of tea and an invitation to a banquet in the gardens next door. Changlin says he wishes he could participate but fears his presence would "hinder and constrain their enjoyment."³ Guignes interprets this as a snub, but Titsingh and Van Braam don't think so. Having the viceroy present would entail extra ceremony and obsequiousness, and the point now is to have a good party.

It is a good party. The Hang merchants are there, along with Qing officials and friends from the lodge. The food is "magnificent," "opulent," served "in the most splendid fashion."⁴ The acrobats are skilled and tireless. The dramas, usually so boring, are great fun, and Guignes does his best to follow the plot of "The Legend of the White

Snake,” which tells the story of the destruction of the famous tower they saw in West Lake in Hangzhou.⁵ He’s beguiled by one of the male actors, “whose face was so agreeable that even if he hadn’t been dressed as a woman, one would have mistaken him for one. During our entire journey, we didn’t see a single woman as pretty.” The actor has had a difficult life: “Although he earned a lot of money both from acting in the theater and from satisfying the tastes of the rich and well positioned, he wanted to abandon his vocation and go enjoy his fortune, but since the status he professed was despised in China, he didn’t dare quit, out of fear of being persecuted by the mandarins.”⁶

In the late afternoon, it starts raining, so the gentlemen go back to the lodge and rest in their rooms. “And thus,” Van Braam writes in his diary, “the embassy reached its end.”⁷

Was it worth it?

Titsingh thinks so and shares his success in a flurry of letters to family, friends, colleagues, and bosses. To his Aunt and Uncle Tintelaar, he writes, “my embassy was carried out successfully with all possible satisfaction, because I was received with the greatest distinction and heartfelnness and enjoyed more proofs of his imperial majesty’s favor than any ambassador here has ever been able to claim.”⁸ To his sister Anna Maria Elisabeth Van Rossum, he writes, “The distinguished and kind treatment shown by the emperor was above any expectations. Never before has an ambassador been treated here with greater attention and honor.”⁹ He describes his journey in vivid terms, probably for the sake of the nieces and nephews he knows will hear the letter: how he took part in so many festivals and ceremonies, how he was pulled on a sleigh in freezing weather, how he watched ice skaters shoot bows at balls, how he had to get up at three or four in the morning to go to court, “which was quite painful in such powerful cold and sharp north wind, and at one point we had to do this five days in a row.”¹⁰ He writes about how he was housed in the palace itself, and treated to excellent meals. He talks about visiting the emperor’s pleasure palaces in Yuanmingyuan, watching fireworks, receiving wine from the emperor’s own hand, touring the most intimate rooms of the palace, “which the Prime Minister himself said was a favor the emperor had never before bestowed on any foreigner.”¹¹ He describes the beautiful return voyage “in charming vessels,” and how the governor of each province fêted him, and old Mr. Van Braam and accompanied them to see the sights.

The family member he’s most eager to write to is his brother Jan, but Jan is dead. The news hits him hard. To Jan’s widow, Maria Cornelia Matthe, he writes, “I will keep hidden from your sensitive

heart how painful this is to me, having consoled myself with the happy prospect of being able to hug him again in a few months after so many years of absence. All the pleasure and happiness that I look forward to in this life is gone.” Yet even to her he mentions the “unimaginable success” of the mission.¹²

Titsingh also trumpets his success to his bosses, taking the extraordinary step of sending a dispatch on an English ship bound for Batavia. Official correspondence is supposed to go exclusively on Dutch vessels, but he writes that he can’t refrain from taking this opportunity to inform them of his safe return and of “the unusual pleasure that the emperor showed at the sending of this embassy to him.”¹³ His overview is brief—partly because he knows that the letter might be read by the British—but he leaves no doubt of his success, discussing the warm treatment and unprecedented access he enjoyed, including tours of the emperor’s own living quarters, “a favor that they said was without any precedent, that never before had any foreigner set foot in these places, and even very few of the highest mandarins had ever gained entrance to them.”¹⁴

Titsingh’s bosses are delighted with this and other news they hear about the mission and agree with Titsingh’s assessment, expressing their “utmost satisfaction with the happy success.”¹⁵ They’re pleased that Titsingh fulfilled his instructions to the letter, doing his job with tact and aplomb, gaining the good graces of the emperor and his officials.¹⁶

Even Titsingh’s neighbors in the lodge two doors down must admit he succeeded. The British, who had shunned him and even spread rumors that he wouldn’t be received in Beijing, come to offer congratulations, although they privately snipe at the way he achieved success, noting in their daily journal: “It is said [the ambassador] conformed without scruple to the ceremonies of the court and was on that account in great favor with his imperial majesty.”¹⁷

Titsingh enjoys the pleasures of being a returned ambassador in the emperor’s highest graces. Officials treat him with deference, and he learns that the emperor will repay all the tolls and duties for his flagship, the *Siam*, another reason to view the mission as a success.¹⁸ It seems he’ll end his career in triumph, returning to Europe as a successful ambassador to China.

Man proposes. God disposes. The bad news arrives on an English ship on August 9, 1795: “We were informed that pretty much all of the Dutch Republic was conquered by the French nation and that the royal house fled in fishing boats to England.”¹⁹ Subsequent communications make clear the extent of the disaster: the British are blockading Dutch harbors, seizing Dutch ships, and capturing Dutch

colonies.

Even before this news, the situation was bad enough. “Trade in Canton,” wrote one observer, “has never been in such a deplorable and ruinous state as today.”²⁰ The web of debts that sustain commerce has become stretched and tangled, and even the wealthiest are vulnerable, as is made clear by the case of Shy Kinqa (石中和). He was once one of the richest Chinese merchants but can no longer keep his creditors appeased.²¹ Not long after Titsingh returns from Beijing, Chinese officials bring the bankrupt merchant in front of the Europeans, chains clanking. He smacks his head against the ground and begs for forbearance, crying that if he can’t pay the taxes he owes the emperor, he’ll spend his life in jail. The Spaniard Manuel de Agote sketches him in his dirty rags, writing that it’s “enough to melt the hardest heart.”²² The British director Mr. Browne must have a harder heart, because he thinks it’s all a show and that Shy Kinqa “has probably little cause to apprehend the Punishment which he affects to dread.”²³ He and other creditors give token relief but not enough. Shy Kinqa is taken back to prison, where he’s beaten so badly that his teeth fall out and he dies of an infection.²⁴

Mr. Browne and the British are doing fine. Their East India Company has access to silver, because it accepts deposits from private traders in China, but the Dutch East India Company forbids private trade, so the Dutch lodge is reliant on yearly silver shipments from the Netherlands.²⁵ This year, as in years past, the Dutch have been buying tea and silk on credit, but as it becomes clear that no ships from Holland are coming, their suppliers become anxious, because they themselves are overleveraged: the tea and silk they provided was purchased on credit from inland suppliers, who can be quite insistent about payment.²⁶ What happened to Shy Kinqa might happen to any one of them.²⁷

So they stop extending credit to the Dutch, as do procurers of basic necessities.²⁸ The Dutchmen hope that a ship from Batavia might still arrive with goods to barter or use as collateral, but no vessels come. The Dutch in China are, as they write, “trapped in a neutral country in the middle of our competitors.”²⁹ The French and Danes are gone.³⁰ The Portuguese and Spanish are allied with the British.³¹ The supercargos scramble to negotiate loans, obtaining one from Mr. Beale—the Scotsman who sold them the clocks that broke on the way to Beijing—and another from the Spaniard Mr. Agote. But the amounts are low and the interest rates high.³²

“Never,” Titsingh writes, “have I been in a sadder situation. The rejoicing of the English, combined with the inner knowledge of the weak state of our possessions, and the realization of how easily the

English will be able to take possession of them by pretending to be friends—all of this made me wish to be gone from here.”³³

In fact, Titsingh is free to go. He has a special dispensation from his bosses to sail away on a foreign ship if he wishes, a freedom that others don't share, and his colleagues wonder why he's still strutting around with his costly honor guard, eating and drinking at the lodge's expense.³⁴

The reason is that he feels he still has a job to do. The commissioners in Batavia ordered him to look into irregularities in the Canton lodge: suspiciously high payments for tea and silk and rhubarb, elevated expenses for food and other goods, and apparent lapses in record keeping. His official instructions devoted more space to these matters than to the embassy itself.³⁵ He didn't have time to finish this work before leaving for Beijing, so he's doing it now, conducting interviews and collecting signed statements.

This doesn't endear him to the other Dutchmen, who fear he'll curtail their freedoms and cut off their income. Salaries and commissions are low, so it's the practice to supplement one's pay by dealing on the side.

Van Braam's young nephew, Jacob Andries van Braam, writes that “Mr. Titsingh is planning to work towards our ruin.”³⁶ Jacob Andries used to like Titsingh, appreciating his kindness during the voyage to Beijing and back, but now, he writes, Titsingh, “has become unbearable.”³⁷ He fears that Titsingh is intent on subjugating the Canton lodge to Batavia: “We've never been used to the sycophancy and slavish subservience that ... is continually practiced in Batavia, but rather live here in the Dutch manner.... Mr. Titsingh, on the other hand, has lived in the East Indies for thirty years and isn't used to any other way.”³⁸ Jacob Andries has a temper, and at one meeting, he speaks his mind on a matter pertaining to trade.³⁹ Titsingh responds “with fury and finger-wagging,” saying that he will tell the directors in the Netherlands about Jacob Andries's insubordination.⁴⁰ After this incident, Jacob begins to fear and hate Titsingh, writing letters to his powerful father, the retired admiral Jacob Pieter van Braam, asking him to work against Titsingh in the Netherlands.

To make his case, Jacob Andries provides anecdotes that portray Titsingh as weak, indecisive, and foolish. For instance, he describes a goodbye dinner that Titsingh held for Chinese officials who escorted the embassy to Beijing. Titsingh got drunk and, “in his overly happy mood,” gave a superb Japanese sword to one official and a fine Japanese painting to the other.⁴¹ “We naturally praised this good heart of his,” Jacob Andries writes, “and were quite taken with this kind deed, so how great it was our surprise the next day when we

learned from his Excellency that he had made these gifts when blacked out [*buiten zijn weten*]. He was so upset ... that he even admitted to us that he had cried over them, and that if it were possible to acquire again the Japanese saber, he would pay any amount, because it cost him a hundred gold koban (小判) in Japan. How we stood there looking at each other you can only imagine.”⁴²

For Jacob Andries, the act of giving away these items isn't bad in itself. It's the public regret that surprises him. He feels that a wiser man would have kept these laments to himself, to preserve the impression of generosity. Nor was this the ambassador's only act of drunken foolishness. He describes another gathering when Titsingh drank too much anisette and gave a Chinese officer a silver watch with a golden chain in exchange for a watch made of fake gold. Again, it's not the act itself that surprises Jacob Andries but the fact that Titsingh tells this story again and again, expressing regret and asking people to watch him so he doesn't drink so much in the future. “These episodes,” Jacob Andries writes, “and so many more that they're impossible to describe, stripped him of the sort of respect that we should have felt for him.... Since he couldn't stand himself, how could others stand him?”⁴³

The lodge becomes divided into factions: the Van Braam clique on one side, and Titsingh's adherents on the other. Titsingh's group has just two people besides himself: the supercargo C. C. Bagman (whom Jacob Andries calls a secret Catholic [*poChrist*] who is barely able to write a grammatical sentence), and the director of the lodge, Mr. Dozy the elder (whom Jacob Andries describes as a deceitful sycophant who talks about himself all the time and spends most of his time working on his mansion, which is filled with paintings intended to make people think he has a noble pedigree).⁴⁴ Jacob Andries believes that neither of them really likes Titsingh—they just use flattery to ingratiate themselves. In Dozy's case, the relationship is strengthened by Mrs. Dozy, who, Jacob Andries writes, “has taken into her house the ambassador's little whore-son, and the boy has become attached to her and she even more attached to him, or so she says: According to her feminine expressions, it would hurt her deep in her heart if she should have to separate herself from the child.”⁴⁵

Dinners are tense. “At the table,” Jacob Andries writes, “the ambassador would speak to no one except Mr. Dozy. The rest of the party had to remain silent, and if someone else were to say anything, he would pretend not to hear and wouldn't reply, and so one would sometimes have to listen to the stupidest and most childish conversations from them, such as, ‘Yes, I wish I could sleep until then (then being fourteen days away),’ or ‘When I'm back in Europe I'll do

this and that,' and other such prattle, and as we listened we could barely keep ourselves from laughing out loud."⁴⁶

One day as they're sitting at table, the elder Van Braam declares that he'll soon be sailing away on an American ship. Titsingh objects. Employees may not sail on a foreign ship without express permission, and Van Braam has asked for permission and been explicitly denied. Van Braam says he doesn't care. These are strange times. He says he intends to leave whenever and however he wants. When Titsingh argues back, Van Braam says "hateful things." The worst part is that nearly everyone in the lodge is on Van Braam's side. "It's impossible," Titsingh writes, "to adequately describe all of the anguish I had to endure from him and his adherents." Van Braam even tries to hire away Titsingh's military escorts. Titsingh had once liked the fat Dutchman, impressed by his solicitous charisma, but now, Titsingh writes, "the mask is off."⁴⁷

Titsingh wants his money back, the 30,000 piasters he entrusted to Van Braam last September, when he'd just arrived in China—a huge sum, enough to buy a big country house. Back in the fall, Van Braam had taken the money and returned with Chinese promissory notes made out to Titsingh, but he had warned Titsingh not to mention their arrangement to anyone, because the Chinese don't respect merchants. Shortly before leaving for Beijing, Titsingh had showed the documents to Mr. Dozy, who expressed surprise: one was signed by Monqua (蔡文官), a merchant so heavily in debt that, Dozy said, people were refusing to lend him money.⁴⁸ At that point, Titsingh felt it was better not to raise the issue with Van Braam, to preserve good relations during the embassy, and Mr. Dozy promised to help Titsingh by directing company tea purchases to Monqua so that the merchant could honor his debt to Titsingh.

But now, a year later, there are no ships from the Netherlands, the Dutch lodge can't pay for its tea, and Monqua is nearly ruined, besieged by creditors and in poor health. To make matters worse, Monqua is denying ever receiving Titsingh's money, saying that Van Braam kept the funds for himself and merely told Monqua to transfer to Titsingh debts Monqua owed to Van Braam, asking Monqua to pay Titsingh preferentially from tea profits.

Titsingh's patience is exhausted, and so, one day, just before dinnertime, he confronts his former friend:

I asked Mr Van Braam, in the presence of Mr Dozy and Mr Bagman, whether or not it was true that he had persuaded me ... to entrust him with the investment of my money, and whether or not he had also requested that I tell no one from our lodge about the arrangement. He had

to admit this. I then asked him how he could have entrusted a part of that money to a man whose affairs were widely known to have been in arrears for several years, a man none of the other gentlemen would have entrusted with anything, gentlemen whose advice I was prevented from consulting due to his persuasion.⁴⁹

Van Braam gets angry. He says he invested his own money with Monqua. Would he have done that if he'd known that Monqua was nearly bankrupt? The conversation is interrupted by the steward, who announces that dinner is ready. The tense meal is their last together. After it, Van Braam leaves abruptly, sending a note saying that if Titsingh doubts his honesty, there's no need for them to dine together. "From that point on," Titsingh writes, "he didn't appear at the Dutch company's table and instead went on his own to dine with the English, Spanish, Swedish, and Americans, with whom he said he belonged because he wasn't a Hollander."⁵⁰

Van Braam is fighting about money with other people as well. Everyone's fighting about money. Petitions and letters are written to the Netherlands, and each party complains to anyone who will listen, including the other foreigners. "It's a very extraordinary thing," Agote writes, "that the individuals who are in the service of this Dutch lodge are divided and have no cooperation with each other, forming opposing factions and allowing disputes and hatred to fester amongst themselves. All of this occurred in public, because no one felt any compunction about speaking out against each other."⁵¹

And then Van Braam leaves. Without saying goodbye to Titsingh or anyone else besides a few "adherents," he sets sail for America on a ship he's bought.⁵² Titsingh's informants report that Van Braam tried to purchase three different ships but failed each time because of a lack of credit before eventually managing to purchase this 200-ton ship. "I'm not sure how he did it," Titsingh writes, "since he sought money everywhere and everyone denied him, not to mention other personal debts. I hear that his nephew [Van Braam the younger] and Mr. Zeeman have co-signed various [debts], but I'm told that they'll eventually have cause to complain about their carelessness in this regard. It will be too late then."⁵³

Titsingh thinks Van Braam will get in trouble for this insubordination, because their bosses had explicitly denied permission for Van Braam to repatriate on a foreign ship. They'd also denied another request Van Braam made, a rather grandiose one: to be permitted to return on a Dutch ship but with full honors, as a sort of returning guest captain. (Van Braam suggested he deserved such an honor because "the art of navigation is part of my natural

genius.”⁵⁴) Titsingh is certain that his bosses won’t look kindly on Van Braam’s sudden departure but decides not to pursue the matter too intently. “I wish him all the best,” he writes, “although I thank God to be rid of him, even though he’s left behind so much bitterness that I’m desperate to get out of here.”⁵⁵

Titsingh must make plans for his own departure but can’t make up his mind. Should he return to Batavia, where he’s been promised a good position and could have a luxurious life? No. “It seems clear enough,” he writes, “that the company is going under,” and it’s time to “exit this rotten stage.”⁵⁶ Should he return to the Netherlands? No. He’s not sure he can handle the new political situation, because he can’t decide whether he is more a Princeman or more a Patriot, which is to say, he doesn’t know whether he wants to support the old republic and its regent, the Prince of Orange, or the revolutionary patriot party that’s aligned with the French.⁵⁷

Moreover, there’s less for him in Holland than before: “My desire to return to my homeland after having been away for so many years was above all motivated by my desire to be able to hug him [my brother Jan] again, but now this splendid prospect has been suddenly torn away from me.”⁵⁸

His favorite option is Great Britain, which is stable, prosperous, and filled with friends and acquaintances. Unfortunately, the British are now enemies, and he’s technically forbidden from taking passage on an enemy ship.

He hesitates and deliberates, much to the frustration of Jacob Andries van Braam and his friends, who wish him gone. “He’s wishy-washy and irresolute,” Jacob Andries writes, “wanting one day what the next day he might reject.”⁵⁹ Jacob Andries can’t understand how Titsingh managed to get so far in life. “I cannot imagine how it is that a man like this could have made such a name for himself in the East Indies World, being such a veritable sap [*hals*], indecisive and irresolute.”⁶⁰ He complains about him at length in his letters: “They couldn’t have sent a better man than this to make our days unpleasant.”⁶¹

Titsingh moves slowly, carefully laying the groundwork for his departure. First, he secures his financial situation, arranging for his back pay to be paid directly from the Canton lodge’s limited reserves. It’s a large sum, and this infuriates Jacob Andries and his friends. Why should a wealthy man get so much when so many others are struggling to even buy clothes? They protest that Titsingh should be forced to return the money.⁶² Director Dozy refuses.⁶³ They lodge a formal complaint, to no avail.⁶⁴ They write a secret letter to the Netherlands, saying that Mr. Dozy must be fired or they’ll resign their

own positions.⁶⁵ They complain to their foreign friends, leading Titsingh to write that they “attacked me in public in front of all the foreign nations.”⁶⁶ No one dines together anymore.

Finally, in March 1796, ten months after returning from Beijing, Titsingh loads up his nine large trunks, his two dressers full of clothes, his leather suitcases, his secretary desk filled with books and Asian coins, his vanity sink, his setté with three drawers full of books and papers, and scores of other items and boards the English ship *Cirencester*.⁶⁷ He has so many things that he has to pay an extra 300 pounds.⁶⁸

He’s relieved to be freed from this “hateful society.”⁶⁹ Jacob Andries is relieved to be rid of this “human plague.”⁷⁰ One of Jacob Andries’s friends writes a fake shipping notice for an English paper for “a certain learned Dutchman”:

Shipped by the grace of the select committee of the Hon. East India Company at Canton, onboard the good ship *Cirencester*, in good order and well-conditioned ... the body and soul of a certain learned Dutchman, Britsingh, ambassador to Kien Long ... to be delivered in the like good order and condition (fire, the danger of the seas, death and dotage only excepted) unto the Hon. the Court of directions of the said company in London, they paying freight for the same nothing. With primage and average accustomed.⁷¹

They never place the advertisement, but Titsingh is delivered to England in good order and condition, albeit after an unusually long voyage.⁷²

He’s relieved to be free from the Dutch East India Company but can’t concentrate on his scholarship, because he’s anxious and in poor health, and everything is going wrong. His boy, William, who had been sent ahead in the company of Mrs. Dozy, is missing, as is Mrs. Dozy herself.⁷³ A chest containing his gifts from the emperor has been seized by the British.⁷⁴ The Canton merchant, Monqua, has committed suicide, leaving many of Titsingh’s debts unpaid, and since his other investments aren’t paying out because of the war, he finds himself “in the direst straights.”⁷⁵ “Everything,” he writes, “seems to be against me.”⁷⁶

He locates William, who is safely at the Cape of Good Hope with Mrs. Dozy, but the chest and most of the funds from Monqua aren’t recovered, and he has a hard time adjusting to life in England. “In India,” he writes, “I had many servants, and they took care of everything. I never had to busy myself with their work. Now I have to keep an eye on everything, because it seems that nowhere in the

world are domestic servants worse and less trustworthy than in England.”⁷⁷ His manservant is a dolt (on one occasion he causes ink to spill all over Titsingh’s letters), and he can’t find a decent copyist, so he has to write himself, meaning he frequently spends the entire day at his desk. He claims that all this trouble with wealth and servants and material things isn’t worth it: “With just a couple rooms and a single chest of clothes, and another chest of underwear, I’d be eternally happier.”⁷⁸

He complains that the English waste much of the morning visiting one another, but he does like the illustrious people he socializes with: George Macartney, George Staunton, John Barrow, William Marsden, William Wilberforce, Frances Wilton.⁷⁹ The explorer Joseph Banks sponsors Titsingh as a member of the British Royal Society, to which Titsingh donates his collection of Japanese minerals. (Charles Blagden says they’re European fakes.⁸⁰) Banks even intercedes to help recover Titsingh’s lost chest of imperial gifts, to no avail.⁸¹

Yet he’s homesick, writing that he longs to “hug my people after an absence of thirty-three years” and saying the burning desire to do so gives him no rest either night or day. “I must satisfy that desire or I will fall into a heavy illness—I can solemnly testify that since being touched by that desire I’ve not had an hour of true contentment.”⁸²

At least, he thinks, the war will soon be over, and he’ll be able to return to the Netherlands.⁸³ But the war goes on. It’s not until 1801 that he’s able to visit Amsterdam. The family holds a reunion dinner at his sister’s mansion, where a 24-year-old nephew recites a poem:

Your fame spread
Through Japan and Bengal
even to Canton and Beijing ...
You ... met sovereigns and emperors
But your purer happiness
is better fulfilled *here*
in the circle of your sisters.⁸⁴

He meets nieces and nephews for the first time, and also his half-sister Santje, who stores his Japan collection in her stately residence.⁸⁵ He also manages to collect back wages, despite the fact that the Dutch East India Company has ceased to exist: 22,276 florins, a huge sum.⁸⁶

His depression lifts, and he begins working hard again, dividing his time between Amsterdam and Paris. Amsterdam is less interesting, so it’s a better place to concentrate on his main project: a translation of the *Chronicle of the Rulers of Japan* (日本王代一覽), a task

he finds tedious. “Amsterdam, where the principal object is how best to kill time, is the proper spot to work on it.”⁸⁷ Paris is much more fun, and he eventually moves there, renting a spacious apartment in a newly renovated neighborhood with modern street-lighting. Here, surrounded by his books and art, with a pencil sketch of his son hanging in the salon, he plugs away, wearing his sarong and Japanese dressing-gown around the house, patching them as they begin to wear.⁸⁸

His goal is to publish the Japanese chronicle simultaneously in Dutch, French, and English translations, but he’s a perfectionist. When, in 1807, he’s finally ready to send the Dutch version to Amsterdam for publication, he receives a visit from Guignes, who points out that the Chinese pronunciations he’s included in parentheses after Japanese terms are Cantonese rather than Mandarin.

Titsingh realizes he’s made a serious mistake: “the material difference between the Canton and Peking pronunciations ... render’d the whole quite a gibberish.” Even if he were to fix the Chinese transliterations in the Dutch version, he’d still have to go back and fix the English and French versions. He tries preparing a separate table with the Mandarin transcriptions, but “having finish’d it, I found it quite insufficient, on account of the vast number of other names in the Japanese Chronology, not to be found in this. Conscious how anxious I might be, prompted by shame for an inactivity of so many years, to have it publish’d as a fore-runner to an ample collection, no reason whatever cou’d plead for the willful birth of a deform’d offspring.”⁸⁹ He starts anew. Guignes helps with the Mandarin.

It’s hard work, and people call him a misanthrope, but he doesn’t mind:

I did not suspect it once should turn my greatest comfort shunning all society, not to be distressed by the topics of the day, reading for upward of three years no newspapers, always taken up by arranging & translating. It completely absorbs my time, & diverts [me from] ruminating on the dreadful calamity [that] my country is plunged in by a series of disasters, to which no end can be foreseen. My days pass in a monotony few people would bear. By exercise of mind & body, time glides on imperceptibly & will continue [to do] so, I hope, until the curtain drops. They look on me here as a misanthrope. It does not affect me, taught by experience what value to put on the opinion of the gross of mankind.⁹⁰

Yet for all this labor, he publishes nothing. Partly it’s due to his meticulousness, but partly it’s because, as a Dutch publisher tells him, in these trying times, the publishing industry is in such decline that

titles pertaining to arts and sciences don't sell as well as novels. "This," Titsingh writes, "is what fraternity has reduced us to."⁹¹

Yet he doesn't try very hard to publish. For instance, in 1811, he sends the English manuscript to his friend William Marsden, saying that he has no objection to its being published but is "firmly determined not to meddle with the business." He'll supply the materials and maps and drawings and any other information they need, but that's it. If publishers ask for any subsidies, "I utterly decline." If nobody wants to print it, he'll deposit it "in proper hands, in hopes, after my decease a more propitious time may come."⁹²

Two months after writing these words, he dies in his Paris apartment. The cause is pleurisy, "a disease which," an editor would later write, "would not have proved fatal had Mr. Titsingh followed the advice of his friends and called in professional aid."⁹³

His will stipulates that his complete collection, including letters and manuscripts, be donated to the British Museum, but Britain and France are at war again, and French authorities block the transfer. Napoleon himself becomes involved, with the result that Titsingh's collection ends up at the National Library in Paris. French ministries are invited to take their pick, and the rest is returned to Titsingh's heirs. According to some accounts, his son, William, who's had a difficult life, sells the collection to cover gambling debts.⁹⁴ Titsingh himself felt that William was a good boy, whose only character flaw is a "hole in his pocket."⁹⁵

Shortly before his death, Titsingh submitted the Dutch versions of his writing to the Dutch Royal Institute for Science, Letters, and Fine Arts. The institute asks one of Titsingh's enemies, Anton Reinhard Falck (1777–1843), to decide whether it merits publication. Falck and Titsingh stood on opposite side of a power struggle in the company—Titsingh frequently complained about the "Party of Falck."⁹⁶ Falck advises against publication on the grounds that Titsingh thinks that the Japanese "are as civilized as the foremost peoples of Europe, and I doubt very much that the author would be able to adduce any evidence for such an unusual position." He declares Titsingh's literal translation "entirely objectionable, ... since those works belong to eastern Asia and are thus filled with superstitious nonsense and miserable fairy tales whose constant repetition is unbearable."⁹⁷

Eventually, in 1824, one of Titsingh's works—his description of Japanese marriage ceremonies—is published in Dutch, but his major labor, the translation of the shogunal chronicle, is never published in Dutch at all.

French translations of the marriage ceremonies are published in

1819 and the chronicle in 1820, followed by English translations over the following couple of years.⁹⁸ Most of his other writings, including his accounts of embassies to the Japanese shogunal court and his account of the voyage to Beijing, remained unpublished until the 1990s. Titsingh could have made a great name for himself as a traveler and statesman, the only European since the sixteenth century to serve as envoy to both the Chinese and Japanese courts. But he was more interested in scholarship than celebrity.

Not so with Van Braam, who immediately publishes—partly at his own expense—an account of his voyage, with almost no editing or research. The final version is remarkably close to the diary he kept during his voyage, albeit in French rather than Dutch. But let's go back and follow him as he absconds from Canton and sails for America.

On the way to Philadelphia, he calls at the Cape of Good Hope, apparently with the intention “of persuading Mrs. Van Aarsse to go with him to America,” or at least that's what Titsingh's informants report.⁹⁹ She's a wealthy widow, well connected, but Van Braam instead decides to take her seventeen-year-old sister, Johanna Egberta Constatia. He says his intention is to see to her education, but he ends up seeing to other things. When exactly their sexual relationship starts isn't clear. He doesn't even mention her in his lengthy account of the voyage from Canton to America, noting merely that he “completed all my business in a most satisfactory manner at the Cape of Good Hope.” But it's not long before he is presenting her as his second wife.¹⁰⁰ (He'll remain married to the first, who is the girl's aunt.¹⁰¹) She's a pretty girl, although pale and epileptic. “She would get up, scream, and fall suddenly, and when no one was around, no spoon was put into her mouth. At those times she would bite her tongue to pieces.”¹⁰²

The two arrive, unwed, at the Port of Philadelphia in April 1796, and the ship's manifest lists the scores of crates and chests they unload: chinaware, porcelain fruit and figurines, silver table ornaments, Chinese lacquerware, paintings, books, imperial presents, and much more. Also noted is a “box of China for Lady Washington,” which Van Braam has specially commissioned to curry favor with America's first family.¹⁰³ Her initials, MW, appear within a green laurel wreath, which is within a golden sun. Around the outside is a chain of fifteen links, one for each state: South Carolina, Georgia, and so forth.¹⁰⁴

Most of his collection, however, is to be displayed in a mansion he begins building on the banks of the Delaware River. He names it

“China Retreat” and spares no expense. It features the typical neoclassical elements of early American architecture, including a Roman pediment and a round portico with Corinthian pillars, but it also has golden dragons perched on the eaves and a hexagonal pagoda on top, its roof curved in the Chinese fashion. The pagoda is copied from the tower of Gaomin Temple that he so admired, with chains descending from its pinnacle and hanging down from each corner of the roof, terminating in a wind chime. Visitors hear these bells as they ride along the road he’s renamed China Lane or row up the duck-filled river. If they’re lucky, they might even be traveling on Van Broom’s longboat, oared by eight Chinese servants dressed in white, or in his carriage, its four horses driven by a Chinese coachman.¹⁰⁵

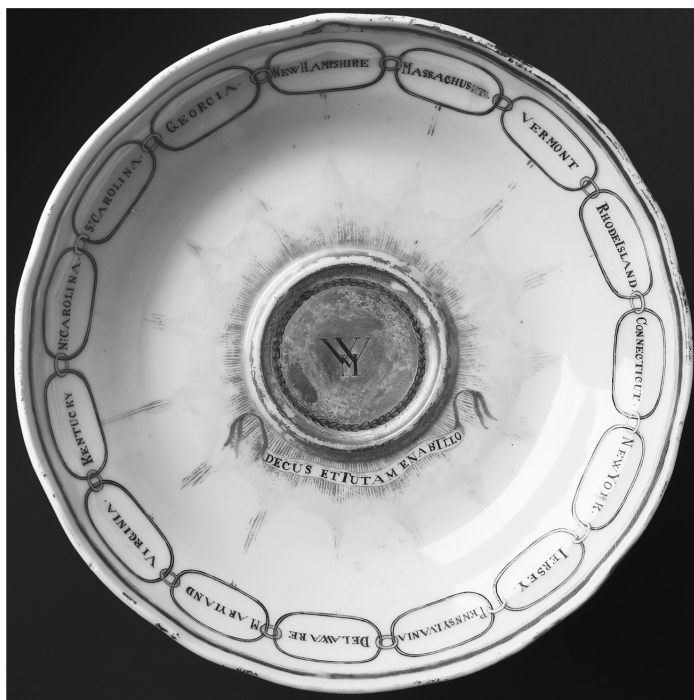


FIGURE 24. Martha Washington china, commissioned by Van Broom. Saucer from Van Broom’s Lady Washington china Service, commissioned for Martha Washington by Andreas Everardus van Broom Houckgeest, c. 1795.

Source: George Washington’s Mount Vernon Museum, Object number W-509. Courtesy of Mount Vernon Ladies’ Association.

Once inside, visitors find themselves in a sort of museum of China,

as viewed through Van Braam's eyes. "One truly feels transported to China," writes a guest, "when surrounded by these living Chinese, and by these representations of their manners, their usages, their monuments, and their arts."¹⁰⁶



FIGURE 25. China Retreat. "Van Brant's [sic] place on the Delaware River," ca. 1808. This detail of a watercolor by William Russel Birch depicts "China Retreat," the house that A. E. van Braam Houckgeest built in the 1790s on the Delaware River, not far from Philadelphia. Van Braam displayed his collection of Chinese art and artifacts here, attracting many visitors. The pagoda on top was a copy of the Gaomin temple tower near Yangzhou, which Van Braam deeply admired.

Source: Library Company of Philadelphia, Print Department drawings & watercolors, P.8759.2.

The center of the house is the Music Room, so named because Van Braam's grown daughter, Everarda, plays the piano here. Sometimes Van Braam himself strums his guitar, singing in a voice so high that it might be "taken for that of a female."¹⁰⁷ But music is a secondary function. The room is mainly intended to display his collection.

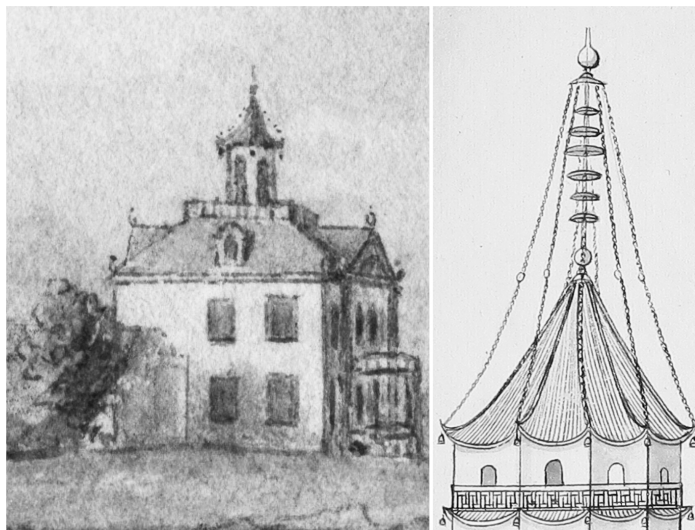


FIGURE 26. The pagoda of China Retreat, inspired by Gaomin Temple Tower. These two details, one from a William Russel Birch watercolor (left panel) and one from a Chinese painting, “Vue de Cau-ming-tsi, 12 Mars” (right panel), show how Van Braam was inspired by the Gaomin Temple (高旻寺) tower, which he saw when he passed through the Yangzhou area in 1795. He modeled his own house, China Retreat, on it. One can see the roof spire and the bells hanging from the eaves.

Source: On the left, detail of William Russel Birch, “Van Brant’s [sic] place on the Delaware River,” watercolor, ca. 1808, Library Company of Philadelphia, Print Department drawings & watercolors, P.8759.2. On the right, detail of “Vue de Cau-ming-tsi,” by Chinese artist in Guangzhou, Album of Chinese drawings and documents, BR 350, no. 22, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Florence, Italy. Reproduced by permission of the Ministero per i beni e le attività culturali e per il turismo / Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Firenze. Reproduction prohibited.

Two large frames are affixed to the walls, each holding fifty ivory carvings of birds on tree branches, their eyes and beaks and feathers sparkling with rubies and garnets. The shelves and tables are filled with art and precious artifacts: a hundred exquisitely-carved bamboo statuettes; a rare vase carved of a single piece of crystal; sandalwood chests containing dessert services and painted with waterfalls, houses, and horses; little intricate silver statuettes; a rhinoceros-horn cup that, Van Braam boasts, warns one when it contains poison; landscapes and views of China in oil; paintings on glass in the Cantonese manner; small oval pictures on ivory and in oil; a near-perfect copy of Titian’s famous Venus made by a Chinese painter.¹⁰⁸ There’s also a tabletop diorama of a Chinese garden, with silver animals and people posed in a landscape of rocks and trees, streams and bridges, with a pagoda in the center. At night, the flickering candles bring the figures to life. As one visitor writes, “the genius with which the Chinese artist has represented every thing compleats

a whole that the amateur can never sufficiently admire.”¹⁰⁹ Another visitor calls the pieces in this diorama “the most beautiful Chinese ornaments I have ever seen in my life.”¹¹⁰

But the most important part of Van Braam’s collection is a set of thirty-eight albums containing about 2,000 images, which he has painstakingly collected and commissioned. A visitor might want to start by leafing through the volume of detailed maps, province by province, from “Tchéli” (直隸) to “Quei-chew” (貴州), all painstakingly drawn with rivers, mountains, and a dizzying array of cities.¹¹¹

The most absorbing volumes contain paintings. Volumes of landscapes depict hills and mountains of infinite variety, from the odd-shaped vertical pillars of Guangdong to the curated knolls of Hangzhou or Yuanmingyuan. There are rivers and canals, dikes and causeways, bridges and waterfalls, lakes and islands, pagodas and towers rising behind walls that march into verdant hills or along busy rivers. There are forests, meadows, plains, and fields; farmers planting rice on terraces and guiding plows through rich earth. There are imperial palaces, royal gardens, scholars’ groves, examination halls, guardhouses with soldiers, and temples thronged by worshippers. Two volumes depict gods and goddesses of startling variety: holding swords, spears, tridents, fans, dressed in unusual clothing and painted in lurid colors. Visitors are surprised at how many dieties there are: gods of lightning, thunder, wind, rain, prosperity, fertility, healing, and so forth, baffling in their variety and proof “of the extravagant lengths to which the imagination is capable of going when it takes superstition for its guide.”¹¹²

Some volumes depict sages, emperors, and officials in period costumes, while others contain scenes of armies clashing and cities burning. One contains fifteen drawings of Chinese torture techniques. A few albums are lighthearted, with Chinese games, entertainments, and music. Many others are useful, depicting tools and techniques, such as the production of rice, cotton, silk, tea, and porcelain. There are paintings of people sowing, weaving, glassmaking, printing, and fishing. Others depict clocks, vases, bells, carts, and boats and ships of all types. Some sections are devoted to flowers and fruits, others to shrubs and trees, others to animals, such as birds of “beautiful colours that seem to belong exclusively to Asia,” or snakes, lizards, spiders, cockroaches, dragon flies, snails, and wasps. There are twenty drawings of the European-style palaces of Yuanmingyuan, which Van Braam himself never got to see, much to his disappointment, to the point that he even wonders whether they actually exist at all.¹¹³

Altogether, these albums are a unique treasure, with no equal

anywhere in the western world and they're made all the more interesting by the careful notations on many of them, based on his experience in China.¹¹⁴

It's no surprise that visitors flock to China Retreat, including some of the most illustrious residents of the young republic. Wealthy Theophilus Cazenove is a frequent guest, referring to Van Braam as "the mandarin" who "is greatly promoting China."¹¹⁵ The French statesman Talleyrand stays for days, impressing Van Braam's grandson as "a very ugly man with a deformed foot, about the middling size, and very talkative."¹¹⁶ The linguist-philosopher Constantin François de Chasseboeuf visits, although he's no fan of China. In his book *The Ruins*, just translated by Thomas Jefferson, he writes that "the Chinese, governed by an insolent despotism, by strokes of bamboo and the cast of lots, restrained by an immutable code of gestures, and by the radical vices of an ill-constructed language, discover in their abortive civilization nothing but a race of machines."¹¹⁷ This is quite a different perspective from that of Van Braam.

Perhaps the most perceptive visitor is the Polish poet-statesman Julian Ursyn Niemcewicz. Arriving by boat with a group of ladies ("How beautiful are the women of this country, as their children are robust and healthy!"¹¹⁸), he's struck by the immensity of the place and the unnecessary opulence: vast cellars laid with expensive flagstones, milk and cream stored not in wooden or earthenware tubs but in porcelain bowls a foot and a half in diameter.¹¹⁹ Even the larder has porcelain tubs for meat. "In truth," Niemcewicz writes, "everything was so much in porcelain that I thought for a moment that his wife was made of the same material, she was so pale and still."¹²⁰

In the Music Room, Niemcewicz appraises the dioramas and precious bird art ("more curious than useful") and admires the Chinese copies of European art, which are painted "with an exactness of which they themselves alone are capable." In Europe, such copies would be expensive, but Van Braam says they're cheap in China. "All this," Niemcewicz writes, "very precious here, very pretty, was made in China at a very low price; labor is considered as nothing there." But he's most impressed by the albums of maps and paintings. "This illustrated collection," he writes, "with a text by a man who has been there could give us precise information on these people, so ancient and so interesting."¹²¹

Yet Niemcewicz notices that his host seems unhappy amid all this luxury, and Van Braam confides that he's worried about legal and financial matters. The house cost a fortune, partly because he was in

such a rush to complete it that he promised double wages to the workers. His plaster-man, William Thackara, and his house carpenter, Thomas Smith, have sued him for unpaid accounts, as have the former owners of the land China Retreat stands on (Van Braam complains that he agreed to pay too much for it). Even his son-in-law, Staats Morris, has sued for unpaid debts.¹²² He's been fighting back, lodging appeals and making deals, but it's exhausting and demoralizing.

Van Braam tells Niemcewicz that he's even had to spend time in the Bucks County Jail for his failure to provide restitution.¹²³ "He acutely resented this injury," the poet writes. "He spoke of it with a heart wounded by grief." Van Braam blames others, but Niemcewicz thinks Van Braam is at fault: "If he brought us great riches and great curiosities from that country [China], it seems that in return he has left there all his good sense and all his prudence. Instead of conforming to the simplicity of the country, he has sought in his buildings and all his enterprises to flaunt an Asiatic luxury."¹²⁴

Van Braam's complaining apparently bores Niemcewicz, who adroitly moves him to another topic: "His complaints would never have finished if I had not put him on the subject of the Emperor of China. Immediately his face became radiant. He began to tell us of the lunch to which he was invited by this prince; of the glass of wine and the presents that the Emperor himself had sent to him, etc."¹²⁵

Van Braam tells his visitor that he's publishing a book about his experiences in China, which Niemcewicz doubts will amount to much, because engravings made in America are not very good, but Van Braam has high hopes for it, as does another frequent guest at his house: the scholar and statesman M  d  ric Louis   lie Moreau de Saint-M  ry (1750–1819). A refugee from The Terror in France (he made an enemy of Robespierre), Moreau has founded a bookstore and publishing house here in Philadelphia. He himself has authored influential books on law and geography, in which he argues for race-based slavery, but now he's hoping to make a splash with Van Braam's book, and he's engaged the famous Talleyrand to publicize it in Europe.¹²⁶

It's an ambitious work: two large volumes with elegant typography, extensive marginal notes, and plentiful maps and engravings. It starts with a dedication to George Washington extolling "the virtues which in your Excellency afford so striking a resemblance between Asia and America."¹²⁷ It has a scholarly sheen, with a seventy-five-page glossary, extensive appendices with letters and documents, a translation of a Chinese play, and a description of Van Braam's collection of Chinese maps and paintings.

Most important, it describes Van Braam's journey through China, with him as the central figure, containing anecdotes and observations about Chinese arts, agriculture, manners, and manufactures. The text itself is episodic, following Van Braam's thoughts and experiences day-to-day.¹²⁸ Moreau's foreword admits that there's some repetitiveness and a lack of order but says that this only increases the veracity of the text: "It is simple facts that he relates; he commits them to paper in the order in which they present themselves; he even does it with a sort of eagerness admitting of no studied arrangement, or combination over which the usual vanity of an Author might have exerted its influence: all these circumstances are so many vouchers that his relation has been dictated by truth."¹²⁹ Van Braam boasts, in his own foreword, that he hasn't even read books about China for the past twenty years, presenting this as a virtue: "there is not a single line borrowed from any traveler or writer whatever."¹³⁰

He and Moreau are full of hope when they load 500 copies of the first volume on a ship to Europe, but unfortunately, the vessel is captured by a French privateer. A Parisian publisher obtains a copy and rushes out a pirated version, converting that one volume into a two-volume set and conveying the impression that this is the complete work, even though it's missing all of the material from Van Braam's second volume: hundreds of pages of Van Braam's travel account, descriptions of Canton and Macau, Van Braam's American itinerary, his reflections on China, the extensive appendices of correspondence and other details relevant to the embassy, and the seventy-five-page index.¹³¹ The pirated version is cheaper and ends up supplanting that of Van Braam and Moreau. It also ends up affecting people's judgments of the mission itself, because some of the most pleasant parts of the voyage are left out, such as sections about the trip back from Beijing to Canton, when the delegates were fêted and allowed to tour the sights, something not permitted to Macartney. To multiply the problem, the pirated version is the one that ends up being translated into German, Dutch, Danish, and, most importantly, English.¹³² Readers obtain only a partial understanding of the embassy, which may be another reason why the Dutch embassy is still viewed so negatively.¹³³

For Van Braam, the pirating means a loss of income, and Moreau, too, finds himself in financial difficulties.¹³⁴ He resorts to legal arbitration "to wind up my connection with M. Van Braam."¹³⁵

Van Braam sells *China Retreat* and sails for London, leaving behind debts, discord, and some items from his China collection to placate creditors. The rest of the collection he tries to give (or, more likely, sell) to France, but even though his friend Talleyrand, now

France's foreign minister, acts as go-between, the French government declines, perhaps influenced by anti-American feeling.¹³⁶ Moreau is frustrated by "this damned French carelessness!"¹³⁷

Van Braam decides to auction his collection at Christie's in London, to great success. His finances stabilized, he heads for Germany, where he consecrates his new marriage to establish the legitimacy of his newborn son. Then he goes to Amsterdam, where he purchases a handsome canal-side house and leases a castle for the summer. He never resides in either one.¹³⁸ He dies on July 8, 1801. The rest of his collection is sold off.

Van Braam's death is, in a sense, the end of an era. He was one of the last of the Sinophiles, people like Voltaire, Leibniz, and many of the Jesuits, who felt that China offered an example for Europeans to follow: a land governed according to meritocratic and ethical principles, whose enlightened administrators focused on the well-being of the people, fostering agriculture and industry. After the dissolution of the Jesuit order in 1773, European thinkers increasingly came to view China as backward, a benighted contrast to modern, forward-thinking Europe. Some European literati still believed that China's ancient civilization was a paragon of wisdom, but their views were increasingly marginalized.¹³⁹

Van Braam's views don't fit entirely into either tradition—he's less concerned with ancient wisdom and wise governance than with practical information about agriculture and infrastructure—and his perspective on China is unusually laudatory for the period, especially for a lay traveler. In the West, China is increasingly portrayed as a negative example for Europe: stagnant, backward, xenophobic, and arrogant.

Perhaps the embassy of Titsingh and Van Braam is also the end of an era. It turns out to be the last European embassy to be received according to traditional Chinese audience ritual. The British do try sending another ambassador, in 1816, who refuses to kowtow and is sent away without meeting the emperor. The British don't have any other embassies received in the Qing court—nor does any other European state—until after the Opium Wars of the mid-nineteenth century, when they insist on new diplomatic protocols.¹⁴⁰

What can we learn from the last embassy? How do we assess it in the history of Sino-Western relations?

CONCLUSIONS

A Contested Embassy and the History of Sino- Western Relations

TITSINGH HIMSELF KNEW how to assess the mission—as a success—and his bosses felt the same, writing in various places how pleased they were with its happy outcome and noting that it “was carried out in a most praiseworthy fashion, to the great honor of the Dutch Nation.” They also noted that it was inexpensive “compared to the immense expenditures that were paid out by the throne of England ... with much less success.”¹

Others, too, spoke glowingly of the mission: Van Braam, of course, who took credit for starting the whole endeavor, but also the missionary Jean-Baptiste-Joseph de Grammont, who had criticized the British for their failures. “It is certain,” he wrote, “that the Dutch gentlemen have left behind them the best reputation, and that also, after the ambassador’s departure, the emperor has on different occasions issued praise for his modesty, his moderation, and his tact.”²

Some, however, were more critical. Manuel de Agote, who represented the Spanish Royal Philippines Company in Spain, had a web of informants, who kept him apprised of Titsingh’s progress toward Beijing, and he recorded in his diary that the Dutch were “piled in devilish carts,” slept on hard beds, and arrived in the capital

“with few provisions, long beards, and empty bellies.”³ Of course, his informants also told him about how well the Dutch were treated in the capital, the special marks of imperial favor, the tours of palaces and gardens, and the enjoyable voyage back from Beijing.⁴ He just preferred to focus on the negative. He was irritated by the very goal of the mission. The fact that the Dutch sent an ambassador whose sole purpose was to congratulate the emperor encouraged the Chinese “to look down on Europeans and become more and more arrogant, hallucinating that potentates from the farthest-removed kingdoms will come pay their respects.”⁵

Agote thought Macartney did better, because “he didn’t accede in any way to what they wanted (although he did cede just a bit).” Yes, his lordship failed, but at least he kept his dignity: “Although the embassy didn’t achieve anything, the people of Beijing formed a grand idea of the English Nation.”⁶ Agote felt strongly about this, writing that the Dutch set back the cause of the Europeans by encouraging Chinese arrogance, placing European states on the level of Asian ones like Korea, Tonkin, and Siam, who also engaged in diplomacy in China according to Chinese protocols.

Agote never published his diaries, so his criticisms weren’t widely read, but John Barrow held similar views, and his 1804 book, *Travels in China*, sold out multiple editions and was translated into several languages.⁷ Loyal to Macartney, Barrow saw Titsingh and Van Braam’s conduct as an affront. He knew that they used Macartney’s mission as a negative exemplar, an illustration of what not to do, taking their cue from Grammont, who had argued that Macartney’s failure to kowtow angered the emperor and turned court officials against him.⁸ Barrow was incensed by Grammont’s argument and adduced the Dutch mission to refute it:

These two ambassadors [Titsingh and Van Braam], determining to avail themselves of the hints thrown out in M. Grammont’s letter, and thereby to avoid splitting on the same rock which, they took for granted, the British ambassador had done, cheerfully submitted to every humiliating ceremony required from them by the Chinese, who, in return, treated them in the most contemptuous and indignant manner.⁹

So according to Barrow, Titsingh’s willingness to follow Chinese protocols made the Chinese more arrogant and resulted in greater humiliations.

To make this case, Barrow wanted to prove that Titsingh and Van Braam were “treated in the most contemptuous and indignant manner,” but of course they weren’t, so he exaggerated, writing that

Titsingh and Van Braam were carried in tottering little bamboo chairs, lodged in barns and gazebos, and forced to wear sheepskins with the wool still on them, “which, like the Hottentots, they wore inwards.”¹⁰ “Many of the details,” he wrote later in his autobiography, “are too disgusting to repeat.”¹¹ To Barrow, all of this was a sign of China’s backwardness: “The inconveniences they suffered ... are such as can scarcely be conceived to have happened in a civilized country.”¹²

Barrow suggested that Titsingh’s treatment didn’t improve once he arrived in Beijing, writing that “on their arrival in this capital they were lodged, literally, in a stable” and leading the reader to infer that the Dutch stayed here throughout their stay instead of just one night.¹³ He made no mention of the grand residence they occupied next to the Forbidden City and didn’t acknowledge that Macartney was lodged farther away, in Manchu City, in a dwelling so loud that, his lordship wrote, “I could not sleep a wink for the first three or four nights.”¹⁴

Barrow was most interested in the kowtow, enumerating the thirty times they performed the act in Beijing alone: when the emperor passed them in his palanquin, when the emperor’s letters arrived, when the emperor sent disgusting dishes from his table.¹⁵ He savors one episode in particular: when Van Braam’s hat fell off and the emperor laughed. To Barrow, this was a simple case of mockery:

Being rather corpulent, and not very expert in performing the Chinese ceremony, at their public introduction, his hat happened to fall on the ground; upon which the old Emperor began to laugh—“Thus,” says he, “I received a mark of distinction and predilection, such as never ambassador was honoured with before. I confess,” continues he, “that the recollection of my sufferings from the cold, in waiting so long in the morning, was very much softened by this incident.” No man will certainly envy this gentleman’s happy turn of mind, in receiving so much satisfaction in being laughed at.¹⁶

But as both Van Braam and Titsingh describe it, this incident was part of a pleasant meeting, the emperor smiling kindly as he handed them cups of wine. When Van Braam’s hat fell off, a high minister leaned down and picked it up for him, at which the emperor laughed and asked Van Braam if he spoke Chinese. Van Braam replied, “Bu dong,” meaning “I don’t understand,” which made the emperor laugh even more, because, Van Braam writes, he thought it “whimsical” that one might use Chinese to say one didn’t understand Chinese. The emperor, according to Van Braam, kept gazing at him “with a

countenance expressive of the greatest kindness.”¹⁷ Van Braam portrays the incident as a warm encounter, with humanizing laughter. Barrow portrays it as mean-spirited mockery.

Needless to say, Barrow says nothing about the unprecedented tours of temples and palaces, the poetry parties, the intimate plays, or the warm treatment the Dutch received on their way back from Beijing. Throughout, he argues that the Dutch were wrong to believe that abiding by Chinese ceremonies would lead to better treatment: doing so just made the Chinese even haughtier. In contrast, he claims, Macartney made a far more positive impression, forcing the Chinese to recognize that the British were superior to them: “It was a flattering circumstance to the [British] ambassador to observe their anxiety for the favourable opinion of a nation they had now begun to think more highly of, and of whom, in measuring with themselves, it was not difficult to perceive, they felt, though too cautious to avow, the superiority.”¹⁸

Guignes wrote a rebuttal, published shortly after Barrow’s book came out, in which he took the Englishman to task for faking a knowledge of Chinese and making elementary mistakes.¹⁹ He also highlighted false claims, saying that it was unfair to omit details about Titsingh’s warm reception in the Chinese court and elsewhere: “If he wanted to report in good faith all that occurred, he’d have been obliged to admit that Mr. Titsingh was treated better.” Guignes also felt that Barrow was a fool to think that Qing officials respected Macartney for refusing to kowtow. “The Chinese must certainly have been surprised to see people come from so far away, bringing tributes to the emperor, and then refusing to salute him in the manner of the country.”²⁰

But the main thrust of Guignes’s critique was more basic: “One shouldn’t judge the customs of a nation by those of one’s own country.” It’s something he himself had to learn. “I admit,” he writes, “that the conduct of the Chinese surprised us at first, but ultimately it appeared much less strange. Those people accommodate themselves to everything. Their carriages, for instance, which are truly like manure carts [*tombereaux*], are considered good by them, and their houses, too, they find excellent. What can one say against people who treat us as they treat themselves?”²¹ He didn’t particularly like China, and he felt that the Dutch mission itself was a fool’s errand, a mistake brought about because of “the self-love and ambition” of Van Braam.²² But he felt that the troubles he encountered there weren’t due to animosity but to greed. When he learned to respond in the Chinese way, he wasn’t blamed: “Where the mandarins were of ill will was in taking the best things for themselves, and so, on our

return, we often amused ourselves by taking for ourselves the best houses and boats, which had been intended for them. They didn't complain at all and simply obtained other houses and boats for themselves."²³

Few people read Guignes's critique, whereas Barrow's book went on to influence generations of future scholars.²⁴ Barrow's perspective is still influential today. For instance, one recent book states that "the members of the Dutch 'Titsingh [sic] embassy' who visited China in 1794/95 ... were treated with far less courtesy and diplomatic politesse than had been shown the Macartney mission just a few months before. They were unceremoniously assigned to damp, leaky hovels or even left out overnight in their bamboo litters."²⁵ Another modern scholar similarly leaves out the good bits and constructs a narrative of humiliation, writing that the trip was full of "uncomfortable lodgings, inconsiderate local officials, and putrid food," that Van Braam "finished the trip in a wheelbarrow" (not true), that the Dutch were denied coal, kept in cold, smoky rooms, ignored by the emperor and his officials, and forced to kowtow "under the threat of the whip."²⁶ Other scholars have written similarly.²⁷

Why have so many scholars followed Barrow so uncritically? Maybe they didn't bother to carefully read Van Braam's published account, or Guignes's, both of which contain enough evidence to challenge Barrow's judgments. Or maybe they didn't read Dutch or Chinese sources.

But what's surprising is that even some scholars who did carefully read Van Braam and Guignes and who did read Dutch and Chinese sources have judged the mission a failure. The most complete study was published by Dutch Sinologist Jan Julius Lodewijk Duyvendak in 1938, followed shortly thereafter by an article by the great C. R. Boxer.²⁸ Both men could read Dutch and Chinese and grasped from the sources that the treatment Titsingh received at court "was throughout extremely gracious," marked by unique signs of favor.²⁹ They also understood that poor treatment on the voyage to Beijing was unintentional and that the court intended full honors.

Why, then, did they judge the mission a failure? One reason is that they attributed to Titsingh an anonymous diary actually composed by Guignes.³⁰ The diary's final lines mention being finally delivered from the mandarins and complain about traveling in "savage lands" filled with "stupid faces," a paraphrase of a quote from Horace.³¹ It's not a positive perspective. Believing that Titsingh wrote these words, Boxer and Duyvendak concluded that the ambassador himself thought of the mission as a frustrating

disappointment. “His innermost sentiments about his China experiences,” Boxer writes, “may be gauged from the fact that the French version of his official report drawn up at Canton early in 1796, ends with the eloquent taunt.”³² But the lines were written by Guignes, who felt indignant throughout the mission, forced to serve as a lowly translator by his financial circumstances.

Equally important, Duyvendak and Boxer didn’t understand the true aims of the mission, because they didn’t consult documents produced by Titsingh’s bosses. They assumed that the embassy’s main goal was to complain to the emperor and his courtiers about conditions in Canton and accused Titsingh of making a “rash” mistake when he told Cantonese officials that the mission was intended to congratulate the emperor and nothing more, promising not to make any requests or complaints.³³

But was Titsingh’s promise really rash? No. His bosses in Batavia made it clear on several occasions that the goal of the mission was precisely what Titsingh said it was: to congratulate the emperor on his sixtieth year on the throne. In a letter they wrote to their own bosses in the Netherlands, they referred explicitly to the embassy as purely ceremonial: “Although one wishes that the company was in a better condition at present to carry out such a ceremonial embassy, it’s not expedient to refrain from complimenting his imperial majesty, particularly given that the viceroy of Canton has himself requested this vis-à-vis the Cantonese company employees.”³⁴ Why send a “ceremonial embassy?” Partly, they were afraid of being left behind, believing that other European nations had already expressed an interest in sending envoys to Beijing for the same ceremonial purpose. But most importantly, they wanted to remain on good terms with the new viceroy of Guangdong, Changlin, who seemed to want the mission to take place, and whose approval could facilitate trading opportunities.

The commissioners in Batavia did mention that “it is not unlikely that this occasion would also serve as an opportunity to make an appropriate address and to ask for some satisfaction concerning the arbitrary actions of the previous superintendent,”³⁵ but this was an aside. Their fundamental goal was to fulfill the wishes of the viceroy and congratulate Qianlong on his sixtieth year of reign. They made clear to Titsingh, in their official instructions, that he must only raise the issue of trade in Canton if doing so would manifestly not detract from his main goal: to congratulate the emperor.³⁶

Boxer and Duyvendak, who never saw Titsingh’s official instructions, couldn’t imagine that Dutch officials would waste time and treasure on a purely ceremonial embassy.³⁷ Duyvendak even

went so far as to suggest that the Dutch were dupes who didn't even understand their role: "The true character of the Embassy, as seen by the Chinese officials, remained completely veiled to the Dutch victims."³⁸

I'm not trying to suggest that Titsingh's mission was a grand success. In fact, despite its warm reception, it's hard to see that it had any concrete results at all. It didn't end up improving the Dutch situation in Canton or helping reverse Dutch decline vis-à-vis the British for the simple reason that the Dutch Republic ceased to exist and the Dutch East India Company went bankrupt and was abolished. Dutch fortunes didn't begin to revive until the end of the Napoleonic Wars, and by then, the Qianlong emperor had died and his successor was imposing dramatic reforms and contending with a series of ecological and military crises.³⁹ We'll never know if the mission would have helped improve trading conditions in the long run, because there was no long run.

The point is that the Dutch mission so contrasted with the usual narrative of Sino-European interactions—the culture-clash narrative—that even deeply informed scholars were unable to fully understand it in its context. It made no sense to them that the Dutch might be satisfied with a mission that didn't make concrete requests or carry out negotiations, so they assumed it was a failure.

Today, however, our standard narratives are changing. Through much of the twentieth century, it was hard to imagine an alternative trajectory to that of the triumph of the Western diplomatic order, with its nation-states represented by diplomats stationed in capital cities, making alliances and agreements. But now International Relations scholars are suggesting that the traditional "Chinese World Order" may have had advantages over Western models. David Kang, for instance, believes that the hierarchical "tribute system" led to more stable and peaceful outcomes than did the Western "Westphalian" system, with its de jure equal states precariously balanced against one another.⁴⁰ Brantly Womack suggests that China's "asymmetrical relationships" with neighboring states tended to be stable and peaceful, because they promoted coexistence: "the bottom line was mutual (but not equal) respect."⁴¹ Political scientists in China and elsewhere argue that China's traditional system of international relations is preferable to Western models, because it is based on an ideal of harmony: China was considered "as the center of a world that should be unified and peaceful."⁴²

Standard models are being questioned in the discipline of history as well. The most significant such model is that of the "tribute system," associated with the work of John K. Fairbank, the man who

established the academic study of China in the United States.

According to Fairbank and his collaborators—most notably Ssu-yu Teng—“the tribute system” was a set of discourses and practices that China used to organize its foreign relations.⁴³ (They also called this system “the Chinese world order.”) The basic idea was that China was considered culturally superior to the “barbarian” societies that surrounded it and that those “barbarians” might naturally recognize their inferiority and approach the imperial court to seek the benefits of civilization. When doing so, they would naturally recognize the emperor of China as the supreme mediator between heaven and earth, kowtowing before him and offering tribute—usually produce from their native lands. He would reward them with fine things and formally vest them as native kings or chieftains. This “tribute system” was, Fairbank said, a geopolitical expression of the Confucian order. Just as children respect their parents and parents care for children, so should the manifold kings respect the emperor and the emperor care for the kings. Fairbank felt that surrounding states were not necessarily motivated by an attraction to Chinese civilization; they participated in the system for the sake of trade, because China’s rulers insisted on tribute as a condition of commerce.

He believed that the tribute system was bad for China, because it encouraged Chinese exclusivity, leaving it ill-prepared for the modern world. With so little direct experience of and appreciation for Great Britain and other Western countries, China couldn’t adapt.⁴⁴ The “tribute system” was thus at the root of China’s decline. This perspective is quite similar to that of Barrow and other British authors: China’s problem was arrogance, a lack of openness, and an inability to adapt. Fairbank accepted such British ideas.⁴⁵

Today, historians are wary of the “tribute system” model. The trajectory from acceptance to unease can be seen in the extraordinary career of one of Fairbank’s students: John E. Wills, Jr., who studied with Fairbank at Harvard in the 1960s.⁴⁶ Whereas Fairbank focused on the British and Americans after 1800, Wills decided to study Qing relations with other Westerners before 1800.

At first, Wills found the “tribute system” a useful concept, and his two great monographs on Qing foreign relations are filled with references to it.⁴⁷ His central question was simple: How, if diplomatic cultures clashed so deeply, did Western and Chinese statesmen actually interact in the period before Western power was overwhelming? His answer was that interactions were lubricated by illusions. Europeans clung to the fantasy that diplomacy might work as it did in the West—as a series of meetings and negotiations to reach agreements and treaties regarding trade or other matters. They

thus often failed to perceive the role their emissaries played in a tribute system that deployed them as legitimization of the authority of the emperor. Qing leaders clung to the illusion that Western envoys accepted their role in the “tribute system,” that their kowtows affirmed its tenets and demonstrated the attractive force of Chinese civilization and the position of the emperor, rather than, as was often the case, a grudging acceptance of protocols for the sake of economic gain. Like Fairbank, Wills believed that these practices of mutual self-deception were perilous, especially for China: “The focus on ceremony, and thus on appearances, insured that a dangerous reliance on illusion would be a persistent failing of Chinese foreign policy.”⁴⁸

Yet Wills was a careful historian, attentive to his rich sources, and he came to feel that neither side was as beholden to illusions as might appear, growing increasingly disillusioned with the “tribute system” idea.⁴⁹ Toward the end of his long life, he gave up on Fairbank’s model altogether. It was a “wreck,” he declared, and needed to be replaced.⁵⁰ He searched around for alternatives, conferring with other historians, many of whom shared his concerns.

One of the most notable is James Hevia, whose pioneering study of the Macartney mission suggested that British failures had less to do with a clash between cultures than with a clash between empires. In work of stunning originality, he argued that scholars like Fairbank had become too beholden to British perspectives.⁵¹ He believed it was only fair to tell the Qing side of the story alongside the British stories. Yes, the Qing did employ a Sinocentric discourse, but Qing guest ritual discourses and practices must be examined on their own terms. Guest ritual helped Qing rulers orchestrate the interaction of a baffling number of multiple lords in ritual space, which helped maintain the complex Qing imperium, weaving together multiple political structures into an enduring, if ever-changing formation.⁵² He particularly appreciated the way that Qing rulers didn’t just confine themselves to the Chinese ritual system, with the emperor as prime mediator between heaven and earth. They also worked with and within other ritual and metaphysical systems: Buddhist universal kingship, Mongol-Turkic khandom, Moslem confessional leadership.⁵³ He appreciated the Qing “politics of inclusion.”⁵⁴

Many other historians have critically engaged with the “tribute system” notion as well, via different approaches. Some focused on the central-Asian character of the Qing dynasty, suggesting that tribute system discourses could be used in different ways for different parts of this huge, multiethnic empire, and for different neighboring states.⁵⁵ Others showed that leaders were not trapped by the “tribute

system” discourse but were able to adapt it to circumstances, changing their aims and methods and ideals, sometimes engaging with other states in ways quite similar to Western international relations.⁵⁶

That’s not to say that all historians abandoned the term “tribute system,” which even Hevia felt remained useful.⁵⁷ Some suggest that the term “tribute system” or “Chinese world order” can be seen as a “language game” or as a set of discourses that could serve multiple purposes for different actors.⁵⁸ Some have used the term “tribute system” quite differently than Fairbank did, arguing, for example, that it was a set of diplomatic and economic practices that served to knit the East Asian world into a sort of cultural and economic unit, with smaller satellite “tribute systems” that mirrored the Sinocentric one.⁵⁹ Others have placed the emphasis on smaller states’ use of the “tribute system,” showing how they adapted it for their own geopolitical aims.⁶⁰

Others have shown that the “tribute system” was contested even within East Asia and that states seen as accepting a junior role in the “Chinese world order” actually wrangled about the meanings of that role or deliberately exploited the ambiguities.⁶¹ Sometimes a state might send an ambassador on equal footing but have him be received according to the Sinocentric rhetoric, leading to frustration.⁶² At other times, a country might insist on their embassy not being called a tribute mission at all, as the Portuguese did in 1752: signs were posted in Macau declaring that the Portuguese embassy wasn’t bearing “tribute,” but the reception in the capital was nonetheless welcomed within the traditional “tribute” rhetorical framework.⁶³ Often, in such cases, both sides allowed the ambiguity to persist.

But this ambiguity should not be understood as delusion. Deliberate ambiguity was one of the keys to the tribute system framework and the stability of the East Asian diplomatic order. For instance, the Tokugawa shogunate resisted the Sinocentric order, holding the position that Japan was neither inferior nor subservient to China. So how did the Qing and Tokugawa relate? By means of “silent diplomacy,” indirect workarounds that enabled their subjects to trade with each other and even allowed for some high-level exchanges.⁶⁴ At the same time, the shogun attempted to establish his own “tribute system,” with his capital as center. Domestic lords were required to conduct annual pilgrimages to Edo, and so were the Dutch.⁶⁵ The shogunal court sought to place Ryukyans and Koreans into this tributary arrangement, but their embassies to Japan worked via ambiguity. Koreans, for instance, did go on embassies to Edo, but they were adamant that the two countries were equals at best. The

problem was that Korea accepted an inferior position within the Qing-centric order, which meant that Korea's equality with Japan implied that Japan was inferior to Qing China, a prospect unacceptable to the shogunal court. So relations were finessed with forgeries, made-up honorifics, and the like. Ambiguity was vital for Korean-Japanese relations.

Such arrangements worked. The East Asian system was stable and relatively peaceful for much of the eighteenth century (if one excludes Qing incursions into Central Asia and Vietnam). Illusions could be useful. That's the conclusion that Wills came to, later in his life, when he wrote that one shouldn't necessarily disparage illusions in foreign relations, as he had once done, because "adjustment to appearances both sides can live with is real statecraft."⁶⁶

Yet in 1795, it's not clear that either side—Dutch or Qing—needed to resort to illusions. Titsingh, Van Braam, and their bosses understood and accepted the tenets of East Asian diplomacy. They understood that presenting gifts and performing the kowtow to the emperor or shogun didn't signify subjugation or domination in the same way it might have done in the European context. Kowtowing was a gesture of respect not just to an individual but, even more importantly, to a cosmic order. Indeed, a kowtow actively helped uphold that order, just as the emperor's kowtows to heaven and to his ancestors helped manifest peace on earth. International hierarchy was not to be feared. It was a building block for a peaceful and benevolent world. As Brantly Womack has argued, accepting a lower status in a hierarchy in the East Asian context didn't mean a loss of respect. Mutual respect was key to the functioning of the hierarchical East Asian system, and ritual was key to upholding that respect, protecting the weaker party and clarifying the duties of the stronger.⁶⁷

The Dutch understood this. Titsingh and Van Braam saw no problem with kowtowing to Beijing. The problem was that other Europeans didn't necessarily feel that way, and so they portrayed the Dutchmen's acquiescence negatively. As a French acquaintance of Van Braam's wrote, "All mandarins were present when he threw himself on his knees and moved his bottom up and down with so much grace that he earned the praise of the authorities ... but it is said that he practiced for six months."⁶⁸

Things were changing in Europe. In the first half of the nineteenth century, an early-modern diplomatic flexibility gave rise to a new era of more consistent, more universalist practices, with professional diplomats representing their sovereigns in ways we might recognize as modern. It was, Christian Windler writes, a "Threshold Period"

(*Sattelzeit*) in diplomatic practices.⁶⁹ Even so, European states—or those representing them—couldn't unilaterally impose their own diplomatic norms until well into the nineteenth century: diplomacy was intercultural encounter, and diplomatic practices and norms evolved in a pluralistic environment, the result of specific interactions and compromises.⁷⁰ The British were at the forefront of this change, coming to insist on a new order of rational sovereign states interacting on the basis of self-interest. Until quite recently, scholars felt they were right to do so.

Today, we can see a different past and a different future, which is one reason it's worth revisiting episodes like this Dutch mission. It helps open up a world very different from ours, one in which European modes weren't yet universalized, in which "culture clash" wasn't predetermined or inevitable. The cultures in question were much more permeable and flexible than the British-dominated narrative suggests. Patricia O'Neill, the first to write a careful comparison of the Dutch and English embassies, suggested that if the United Provinces hadn't fallen, the Dutch might have pointed the way toward an alternate future: "a relationship with China within the sinocentric context."⁷¹ It's impossible to know whether she's right, but it's certainly the case that the Dutch were far more willing than the English to adapt to other ways, at least in East Asia. They'd been doing so for nearly two centuries, and they would continue to carry out the court journeys in Japan for another half century. So the mission of 1795 does point to an alternative model of Sino-Western relations.

But I think it also reminds us of something else. Diplomacy isn't always about achieving specific ends. It's also about upholding relations. In East Asia, embassies were sent less to negotiate than to commemorate and celebrate: to mark a new year, to congratulate a new emperor or king or shogun, to memorialize a death, and so forth.⁷² Although envoys were sometimes sent for specific negotiations, the ideal was that an emissary should not come merely to make a deal, in much the way that we frown upon the kind of friend who only visits when he wants something. Diplomacy was—ideally—about marking and maintaining relationships.

That's not to say that emissaries and hosts didn't have ulterior motives. In Japan, the Dutch understood that they had a role to play in helping legitimate the shogunal house, which for its part used foreign embassies as a way to advertise its own legitimacy vis-à-vis its subjects. In the same way, in 1794, the Qing court was eager to host Titsingh because his arrival showed that the charisma of the Qing ruling house—and the emperor himself—stretched across the

entire world. For their part, the Dutch were motivated by a desire to build a closer relationship with the Qing and make a better showing than the British. They also hoped to use the visit to improve the situation in Canton.

But the Dutch officials who dispatched the 1795 mission understood that talking business—getting things—shouldn't be their primary goal. They were content to send “a ceremonial embassy.”⁷³

A ceremonial embassy. The thought seemed absurd to many scholars. How is it possible that a Western state—or even an organization representing a state—would waste time and treasure on such a useless thing? Yet the Dutch leaders understood well that ceremony matters, especially in East Asia. Kowtow to the shogun and maintain your position as the only Westerners allowed to trade in Japan. Kowtow to the emperor and remind him of the close relationship the Dutch had always had with the Qing.

The British also accepted the importance of ceremony, and the ostensible purpose of Macartney's mission was “complement and conciliation.”⁷⁴ But Macartney's instructions and conduct made clear that his main goal was to get things done.⁷⁵ As James Hevia has shown, he saw the ceremonial side of his visit as just one half of the process. The second half was to be the business phase, when negotiations would start and he could, he hoped, obtain free trade and stations on the Chinese coast.⁷⁶ The business phase never came. For the Qing, the point of the embassy was the polite interaction: banquets, performances, fireworks. Eventually Macartney's persistence in discussing his outlandish demands became so frustrating that the emperor and his council decided to dismiss him from the capital and return him as quickly as possible to his own country, before he could cause any trouble. The British demanded and demanded, like a bad friend.

Anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski, pondering the many uses of language, was fascinated by seemingly banal locutions like, “How are you today?” or “Nice weather, isn't it?” Such utterances didn't fulfill any obvious information-sharing or performative functions, yet they seemed very important. He suggested that their purpose was to maintain “ties of union,” to create “an atmosphere of sociability.” He felt that they needed a name, so he invented the term “phatic communion,” to call attention to the way that they helped in “binding hearer to speaker by a tie of some social sentiment or other.”⁷⁷

Perhaps we can use the term “phatic diplomacy” to refer to diplomatic acts that have a similar function: to create ties of union or an atmosphere of sociability between states. In this sense, the ideals

of East Asian diplomacy were oriented toward the phatic. Ambassadors came to celebrate, congratulate, and commemorate. That's not to say that East Asian states didn't also conduct other types of diplomacy. Embassies in East Asia could be occasions for the usual instrumentalist aims: trade, intelligence-gathering, and alliance-making. At times in East Asia, diplomacy was carried out in very Western-seeming ways. Similarly, in the West, diplomats engaged in phatic diplomacy, sending congratulations, participating in celebrations, and giving sociable gifts. Western and East Asian diplomatic cultures each contained multiples.⁷⁸

The point is that East Asian diplomacy, in its ideal form, foregrounded the phatic. Embassies were meant, above all, to bind the states of the world together into a sort of community. This is why the relationships were often described in familial terms, with China as father or elder brother and other nations as children or younger siblings. Diplomacy was an expression of Confucian ritual propriety on the international level. All are bound together in communion, one great family under heaven.

Most states that sent embassies to China understood that diplomacy was not just about bargaining, gaining concessions, and signing treaties. As Jack Wills wrote, late in his life, Asian states that sent embassies to China demonstrated "a style of statecraft ... that was focused not on bargaining leading to enforceable commitment, as European diplomacy was at least in principle, but on the maintenance of a regime of communication and interaction which both sides viewed as legitimate and capable of adjustments as circumstances changed."⁷⁹

The Dutch mission of 1795 was an exercise in phatic diplomacy, and it helps give us a fresh picture of Sino-Western diplomatic interaction: not a clash but a mutually satisfying interaction. We historians and social scientists tend to think in terms of strategy, self-interest, power, and domination, and that's salutary. But we can't forget that there's more to history, and to life: the joy of interrelating, of being alive, of rejoicing in the very fact of existence.

The Dutch visitors were greeted so warmly in the Forbidden City and the Imperial Pleasure Gardens not just because their kowtows reinforced the imperial order, but also because it was fun to include these exotic outsiders in the holiday festivities.⁸⁰ Show them the ice games, and encourage them to skate along with Manchu champions. Invite them to a nighttime poetry party, where lanterns sparkle in the snow. Bring them to intimate performances and serve the finest food from your own kitchens. Show them around the most beautiful private quarters of the imperial family itself. Welcome them not just

because you're the emperor and your generosity is renowned, but also because you love this season and enjoy the profusion of peoples in the world, with their different costumes, languages, and customs.

And, ambassadors, take the tours in stride. Maybe you wonder why your first encounter with the emperor takes place outside in the freezing wind. Maybe you don't understand why Manchu skaters hurl themselves to the ground. Maybe your feet are cold. Maybe you're sick of being woken up early and shuttled around from place to place in painful carts. Maybe it hurts to sit on cushions rather than chairs.

But play along, and you'll begin to understand. Yes, it's a far cry from Europe, but one of the beauties of life is how differently it's lived, here and there.

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My first go at presenting any research on this mission was at the Chinese Academy of Social Science Research (中國社會科學院) in Beijing in June 2017. My hosts were warm and incredibly helpful, especially Cui Zhihai (崔志海), director of the Modern History Department, who lent me his bicycle, which facilitated my ability to explore the places in Beijing that Isaac Titsingh and his crew visited, as well as travel conveniently to the Number One Archives in the Forbidden City (中國第一歷史檔案館). Equally warm and helpful was Zhang Jian (張建), assistant professor at the academy, who knows the Number One Archives well and helped me look in all the places he and his contacts could imagine one might find documents related to the Dutch mission. The many scholars who attended my talk at the academy had excellent questions and advice, which proved tremendously useful. I especially thank Guo Yang (郭陽), who urged me to have a look at records concerning Isaac Titsingh's embassies to Edo.

A trip to Guangzhou was equally fruitful, thanks in large part to Paul Van Dyke, whose detailed and foundational work has

transformed our understanding of the Canton trade. He facilitated my access to collections at Sun Yat Sen University, and the conversations we had while dining, exploring the Canton city walls, and walking along the Pearl River waterfront, enhanced my understanding of Canton and its history. He also introduced me to the diary of Manuel de Agote, a historical treasure, and commented on an early draft of this book, providing advice that has proven extremely useful.

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People and institutions in Europe also provided vital support. Koos Kuiper, formerly curator of Old Chinese and Japanese Manuscripts in the Special Collections Department of the Leiden University Library, made available to me manuscripts written by participants in the embassy that are held in the university’s East Asian Library. Diederick Wildeman and Yvonne Ordelman at Amsterdam’s Scheepvaart Museum arranged access to their collection, where I was able to peruse and photograph an informative (and gossipy) run of correspondence between Jacob Andries van Braam and his father. The Stadsarchief Amsterdam also opened its collections, which contained a great deal more than I’d expected. Most important is the Dutch National Archives in The Hague, which have been a sort of home away from home for me. I spent every weekday there for a year and a half or so when a doctoral student, drinking coffee out of little plastic cups with other researchers. The coffee’s better and the cups are no longer plastic, but the collection remains extraordinary. Thanks to the archive’s accessibility, I was able to photograph some sources I finally found, the day before I had to fly back to the United States, including Titsingh’s official instructions. They turned out to be very important.

I enjoyed corresponding with Nanet van Braam Houckgeest, a descendant of the deputy ambassador who is working on a transcription of his travel journal. This will be an important work when it appears.² She and other members of the Van Braam Houckgeest family have carried out significant scholarship on their fascinating forebear, which has provided an essential basis for understanding him today.

I’m particularly grateful to Frank Lequin, recently retired from

Leiden University. For the past three decades, he's been a one-man Titsinghalia factory, and his meticulous books and articles are a foundation for our understanding of the ambassador and his work. I could not have written this book without them. I will treasure our meetings, two Mays in a row, over beer and rijsttafel in Leiden, where our conversation ranged far beyond Titsingh. I'd hoped to make it a trifecta, but COVID-19 put an end to my travel plans. I hope to visit with him again.

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My Emory colleague Maria Sibau provided an opportunity to present a part of this research at the Intercalary Late Imperial China Conference she co-organized at Emory with Ihor Pidhainy and Karin Myhre in February 2020, which turned out to be my final in-person academic get-together before pandemic lockdowns began. A keynote by Sarah Schneewind, who talked candidly about the process of research and writing, sparked ideas that helped me reconceive my introduction and conclusion. Another Emory colleague, Brian Vick, offered thoughts on parts of my manuscript, and his perspective on European diplomacy, conveyed in his beautiful book, *The Congress of Vienna*, helped me widen my understanding of what can be considered "diplomacy."³

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Dawn Odell was also a big part of this project. She is working on a book about Andreas Everardus van Braam Houckgeest and his collection, and it was a delight to share ideas (and shocked indignation) about Van Braam, who was not a particularly admirable man, at least morally and ethically. Conversations, emails, and other collaborations with her enriched my understanding of him and his context, and of Canton Trade Art.

Dawn and I co-organized a workshop, with Karina Corrigan, at the Peabody Essex Museum in Salem, Massachusetts, to explore Van Braam's collection of China trade art. Participants at the workshop had many fascinating perspectives, criticisms, and ideas, especially Kee Il Hoi, Yu-chih Lai, Bruce Maclaren, Eugenio Menegon, Marco Musillo, Jan van Campen, Caroline Frank, and Tao Cai. I was especially struck by the perspectives of Winnie Wong, who changed the way I look at the Van Braam Collection and Canton Trade Art. Her book and dissertation are essential reading for anyone interested in those topics.⁴ Marco Musillo also deserves a shout out for helping us acquire scans of the Van Braam materials in the Biblioteca Nazionale di Firenze, which turned out to be very significant.

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Editor Eric Crahan found outstanding anonymous reviewers. I've published five peer-reviewed books and dozens of articles, and never have I received reader reports as thorough and helpful as these. Reviewer number two's report was particularly valuable, helping me transform the way I thought about this project and its place in the historiography. I wasn't able to incorporate all of their suggestions, but this book is immeasurably stronger because of their close attention.

Another person who provided thoughtful feedback on the manuscript was Tristan Mostert, whose role in this project goes back to its inception. In 2015, he and I and Geoffrey Parker were dining together in Haarlem, and the two of them began talking about the 1790s, when the Dutch East India Company was failing and the British were taking over colonies. I knew so little about this period that I could do nothing but listen, increasingly fascinated, as they talked about Kew Letters and British blockades. I don't know whether either of them mentioned the Dutch Mission of 1795, but the

conversation stayed with me, sparking an interest in this time period, so far from my seventeenth-century comfort zone. Tristan was a wonderful interlocutor throughout this project, sharing sources, advice, and enthusiasm, and his thorough reading of a version of the manuscript helped me dramatically rethink the Introduction. He also alerted me to the fact that the National Archives of the Netherlands was allowing public access to the terrific beta build of its digital archive project, thanks to which I was able to read some of the things I thought I wouldn't be able to because of COVID-19. I am so grateful for his advice and friendship.

My family, of course, deserves the most thanks of all. They were here throughout it all. My parents, in near-daily phone calls, listened attentively as I described a finding or complained about a setback, always ready with good advice: "Gargle salt water," "Don't sweat the small stuff," "Try some THC." They have helped me live a life of scholarship and creativity from the time I was making comics with my brother.

My wife and daughters are a constant source of fun and inspiration, and I feel deeply blessed to live in a house full of such smart, funny, musical, goofy, and talented people. When I step out of my study, grumbling about losing a file because Apple sucks now, there's always something happening, and it's usually quite loud. In fact, I think I'll take a break now for Mario Kart and coffee.

But first, one final paragraph. This wasn't a straightforward book to write. At times, I wasn't sure myself where my work was leading and whether anyone would find the topic as interesting as I do. I knew only that there was something in the time, the place, and the people that spoke to me, so I kept at it. Throughout this process, I was inspired by my youngest daughter, Josephine, who has, since she could speak her first words, doggedly followed intense enthusiasms: first clocks, then airplanes, then money, then lemonade stands, then Roblox, and now art. Sometimes you just have to follow your interests where they lead. People who do so make the world a better and more interesting place, and Josephine is living proof. I dedicate this book to her.

A NOTE ON PLACE NAMES, TRANSLITERATIONS, TERMS, AND SOURCES

IN GENERAL, RECONSTRUCTING Qing place names from texts written by Frenchmen and Dutchmen with an indifferent understanding of Chinese, and whose servants and translators were Cantonese, is an inexact science, to put it mildly, especially given that more than 200 years have passed since the texts were written. Place names have changed, and so has the landscape itself. Some areas—such as the dreaded Eighteen Shoals of the Zhang River, north of Wan'an—have been flooded to make lakes or reservoirs. New rivers have been dredged or canals filled in. Most dramatically, the Yellow River itself changed course in a series of calamitous floods in the 1850s, moving from a southern course to a northern one. Adding to the difficulties is that our only sources at present for the itinerary are Dutch and French diaries, books, and reports that don't contain Chinese characters, only transliterations. We do have one French translation of a Chinese account, but it, too, lacks Chinese characters, and the transliterations are refracted through Cantonese and French. I spent hundreds of hours tracing the journey with these sources and plotting it on Google maps, an endeavor aided by a set of exceptional Qing-era maps, most importantly, the *Kangxi huangyu quanlantu* (康熙皇輿全覽圖), the *Daqing yitong yudi quantu* (大清一統輿地全圖), and the *Qianlong Jingcheng quantu* (乾隆京城全圖).¹ In this way, I was able to plot the course sometimes by the hour. The maps included in this book include only a small number of the places on the itinerary (to avoid clutter), and I invite motivated readers to view the original GIS files that contain all of the points I located, a number of which are educated guesses.²

For most place names, I use the pinyin transliteration system, with Chinese characters included in the notes. For a few names—Canton and Macau, for instance—I use the most widely accepted standard English transliteration.

As for terms, there are a couple of problematic ones. The word

“coolie,” for instance, is used frequently in Chinese and Western texts of the time, as a transliteration of the Chinese term 苦力. But because the term today is considered by many to be a racial slur, I have elected to translate it by more neutral terms, such as “porters,” “laborers,” or “stevedores.”

Another fraught term is “tribute,” which historians frequently use for the act of sending an ambassador to the court of China, or to refer to the system of diplomatic relations in East Asia, as in the term “tribute system.” In the West, the word “tribute” implies the political submission of the giver: “a payment by one ruler or nation to another in acknowledgment of submission or as the price of protection,” or “an exorbitant charge levied by a person or group having the power of coercion.”³ Tribute in the West was what a vanquished inferior paid to a superior as a price for freedom. The Chinese term usually translated by the word “tribute” (*gong* 貢) does indeed mean the act of giving by an inferior to a superior, but it doesn’t necessarily imply the same sort of submission. So the very term by which historians have typically discussed the Chinese diplomatic system, “tribute system,” in a sense supports the culture-clash narrative that this book contests. In fact, the Qing were quite flexible about the term for gifts. Henrietta Harrison has pointed out that the Qing court was amenable to Macartney’s use of the term *li* (禮), a term for gifts that focuses on their ritual propriety.⁴

“China” and “Chinese” are also troublesome terms, especially in the Qing dynasty period. The Qing ruling house and many top officials were ethnically Manchu, not Han Chinese, yet most European records used the terms “Chinese” indiscriminately, often referring to the Qing rulers of China as “Chinese,” a practice also followed by some authors today. Sometimes Europeans used the term “Tartar,” which one can often translate as “Manchu.” The word “China” is even more problematic, because China proper was just one part of the huge Qing empire. The term “Qing empire” raises hackles on many scholars, especially in China, because it seems to them a politicized term, and one that might be seen to impugn China’s current territorial claims. There is a great deal of debate about this issue.⁵ I unapologetically use the term “Qing empire,” because the Qing empire was an empire.

The Macartney mission generated huge numbers of memorials, reports, and edicts, and I expected, upon starting my research, that I might find similar numbers for the Dutch mission. That didn’t turn out to be the case. Standard source collections, such as the *Qianlong Edicts* (乾隆上諭檔), the *Veritable Records* (實錄), and the *Qianlongdi qijuzhu* (乾隆帝起居注), although very helpful, contain considerably less

information about the Dutch mission than about that of Macartney.⁶ An important collection of memorials and other sources pertaining to the Dutch mission was discovered in the Palace Archives and published; it contains a great deal of significant information, but this corpus is far smaller than similar publications of materials pertaining to the Macartney mission.⁷ Research in the Number One Archives in Beijing turned up very few new sources, either in Chinese or Manchu, to my surprise and to that of Qing expert Zhang Jian, who knows the Qing archives extraordinarily well and who was an outstanding host and guide.

Why are there relatively fewer Chinese sources for the Dutch mission than for the Macartney mission? It may be precisely because the Dutch mission went so smoothly. Macartney's outrageous requests and the suspicions that they engendered stimulated a flurry of correspondence between the emperor and the Grand Council on one hand and his officials outside the court on the other. These detailed documents follow carefully Macartney's actions and movements, with the emperor asking for details about Macartney's conduct, his plans, his precise routes, and so forth. The voyage back to Guangdong was particularly scrutinized, because the emperor and his court were worried that the envoy and other Britons were so disappointed by the emperor's rejection of the "absurd demands" [e.g., 妄有干請 and 妄有瀆請] that they would cause trouble by making contact with Qing subjects or with other Europeans.⁸ In contrast, the Dutch raised no difficulties, made no demands (outrageous or otherwise), and were treated extraordinarily well. The very smoothness of the encounter meant that there was less need for reporting.

It's important to note, however, that the Number One Archive's Board of Rites collection wasn't accessible, and since the Board of Rites was in charge of many aspects of foreign missions, that collection may contain significant records. Still, the Dutch mission, like the British, was primarily administered via the Qing Grand Council.

To make up for this relative paucity of official sources on the Qing side, I've had recourse to unofficial sources, including an account of the voyage written by a Chinese participant in the journey, poems by literati, poetry by the emperor, and records from Korean envoys who were present in Beijing and Yuanmingyuan during the time that the Dutch were there.

As for European sources, we have an embarrassment of riches. The most important sources are travel accounts. The main participants in the journey—Titsingh, Van Braam, and Guignes—each wrote detailed accounts, which are extant in more than one version. Of these, Van

Braam's published account is the best known. Less known is a journal that he kept during the journey, which has remained unread and unused, as well as a Memorial he wrote to the directors of the Dutch East India Company. The latter is relatively close to his published account (although it's written in Dutch rather than French), but his travel journal differs in intriguing ways from the other two accounts, providing a more firsthand and immediate record of his experiences, before they were embellished and edited for public consumption.⁹ Sometimes it contains enlightening errors.

It's the same for the two accounts by Guignes. The published account, *Voyage à Péking, Manille et l'Île de France* (1808), is well known, although it has unfortunately never been translated into English or Chinese. It differs dramatically from his travel diary. This diary, titled " 'Journal d'un voyage a Peking' ... 22 Nov. 1794 to 11 May, 1795," was for many years attributed to Isaac Titsingh, which is how it was still catalogued until recently.¹⁰ In 1984, two scholars suggested that Guignes was the author, identifying three passages wherein the first person pronouns suggest that one person authored both texts. I've found dozens more such passages, including many in which the author describes doing things himself that the book version notes were done by Guignes. Actions taken by the journal's author also accord with actions that Van Braam notes in his account were carried out by Guignes, such as the writing of a note that Van Braam carried into the Forbidden City that was confiscated by officials, resulting in Guignes's being summoned for questioning.

None of this definitively rules out the possibility that the journal might have been written by one of the other young gentlemen, such as Dozy, Agie, or the younger Van Braam. But the author writes in first person that he was accompanied at times by Dozy and at other times by Agie. As for the younger Van Braam, he himself did keep a "short journal," which he refers to in letters to his father, but he tended to write in Dutch and in any case, the journal I attribute to Guignes is not short.¹¹ We also can't rule out the possibility that Guignes plagiarized parts of the journal when writing his book, since he was accused of plagiarism later in his life, although it's important to note that those accusations were a salvo in a longer polemical war between him and other Sinologists. (As one contemporary author noted, "the three or four Sinologists who live in Europe ... have never been able to live in harmony with each other."¹²) In any case, the overwhelming bulk of evidence points to Guignes as author.

One of the intriguing things about Guignes's travel journal is that it gives us a more immediate sense of his thoughts and feelings while en route, and the impressions of China are generally more favorable

those that occur later in his published book. The journal also includes many episodes omitted from the published book.

In addition to these firsthand accounts, there are thousands of pages of manuscript sources in the Dutch National Archive; the Amsterdam Municipal Archive; Amsterdam's Scheepvaart Museum Archive; the Indonesian National Archives; and the Untzi Naval Museum of San Sebastián, Spain. I became particularly fascinated by the journals of Manuel de Agote, Primary Representative in China of the Real Compañía de Filipinas of Spain, which are filled with trenchant observations, sketches, and maps.¹³ Typically we see Canton and the Canton trade from the perspective of Northern Europeans, and his delightful journals offer an informative counterpoint. It's often hard for a historian to keep on track, since sources lead us in so many interesting directions. Agote made it particularly difficult.

Last, but certainly not least, are the rich visual sources. Whereas the images produced by the Macartney mission are famous, and justifiably so, those produced by participants in the Dutch delegation are almost unknown today, yet they're extremely informative and numerous. Most notable is a series of more than 2,000 paintings that Van Braam commissioned from Chinese artists. Unfortunately, this collection was scattered shortly before his death, when he sold it at auction to pay his many debts. Parts of it are held today in the British Library; the British Museum; the National Library of Florence, Italy; the French National Library; and, most importantly, the Peabody Essex Museum in Salem, Massachusetts. Some of the extant pieces are related directly to the mission. Others aren't, depicting famous places, monuments, bridges, boats, agricultural techniques, fashions, and so forth. Together, they provide not just information about and context around the Dutch mission but also a rare glimpse into China during the late 1700s. They deserve to be more widely known.¹⁴

ABBREVIATIONS

- ACJ Anonymous, “Traduction du journal d’un Chinois qui a accompagné l’Ambassade Hollandaise, 1794–1795,” in Original manuscripts, papers, and letters relating to Macartney mission to China, 1792–1794, vol. 9, document no. 385, pp. 1–59, Kroch Library, Division of Asia Collections, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY, Asia Rare MSS DS.M117.
- AGR Appendices to the General Resolutions, Archive of the Governor-General and Councilors of the Indies (Asia), the Supreme Government of the Dutch United East India Company and its successors (1612–1811), Arsip Nasional, Jakarta, Indonesia, online at <https://sejarah-nusantara.anri.go.id/appendices-resolutions/>, retrieved October 24, 2019.
- BTC John Barrow, *Travels in China* (Philadelphia: F. McLaughlin, 1805).
- DMA Diarios de Manuel de Agote, Primary Representative in China of the Real Compañía de Filipinas, Untzi Naval Museum (UM), San Sebastián, Spain, Fond Manuel de Agote [Manuel de Agote Collection], 19 volumes, inventory numbers R-633 (for the year 1779) to R-641 (1797), online at <https://itsasmuseoa.eus/es/coleccion/tipologia/fondo-manuel-de-agote>, retrieved October 19, 2020. Under the format: DMA, [year], [inventory number].
- DUYVLE Duyvendak, J.J.L. “The Last Dutch Embassy to the Chinese Court (1794–1795).” *T’oung pao* 34 (1–2) (1938): 1–137.
- DUYVSD Duyvendak, J.J.L. “Supplementary Documents on the Last Dutch Embassy to the Chinese Court.” *T’oung pao* 35 (1–2) (1939): 329–353.
- FVBH1 Barnsley, Edward Roberts. *The First VBH*. (Biography of Andreus Everardus van Braam Houckgeest.) vol 1. Beach Haven, NJ, 1989.
- FVBH2 Barnsley, Edward Roberts. *The First VBH*. (Biography of Andreus Everardus van Braam Houckgeest.) vol 2. Beach Haven, NJ, 1989.
- GAJVP Anonymous (Chrétien-Louis-Joseph de Guignes). “‘Journal d’un voyage a Peking’ ... 22 Nov. 1794 to 11 May, 1795.” British Library: Western Manuscripts, Add MS 18102.
- GRB General Resolutions of Batavia, Archive of the Governor-General and Councilors of the Indies (Asia), the Supreme Government of the Dutch United East India Company and its successors (1612–1811), Arsip Nasional, Jakarta, Indonesia, online at <https://sejarah-nusantara.anri.go.id/generalresolutions/>, retrieved October 19, 2020.
- GVPI, GVP2, GVP3, GVP4 Guignes, Chrétien-Louis-Joseph de. *Voyage à Péking, Manille et l’Île de France: faits dans l’intervalle des années 1784 à 1801*. 4 vols. (Paris: Treuttel & Würtz, 1808).
- HLGJ Gugong bowuyuan 故宮博物院, “Helan guojiao pin an shimo” 荷蘭國交聘案始末, *Wenxian congbian* 文獻叢編, No. 5 (July 1930 [Min guo 19]), unpaginated, found in Gugong bowuyuan 故宮博物院, *Wenxian congbian* 文獻叢編, 10 vols. (Beijing: Beijing tu shu guan chu ban she, 2008), vol. 3, 367–386.
- IIIT “Instructie voor den Heer Mr Isaac Titsingh, Raad Ordinair van Nederlands India mitsgaders Ontvanger Generaal der Jacatrasche Domainen, gaande als Ambassadeur

- van de Nederladsche Compagnie naar het Hof van de Keijzer van China, om zijne Majesteit met zijn zestig jaarige regeering te complimenteeren ende verrigting van al zulke zaaken meer als zullen worden voorgeschreeven, ten einde zich naden inhoud van deeze te kunnen reguleeren,” July 26, 1794, in Raad der Aziatische Bezittingen, Dutch National Archives, The Hague, Netherlands. Nummer archiefinventaris: 2.01.27.02, Number 254 (Bijlagen tot de resolutiëvancommissarissen-generaal, 1794 juli 2–1794 augustus 2, numbers 279–337; unpaginated, but this is item number 332, about two-thirds of the way through.)
- ITC Titsingh, Isaac. *Isaac Titsingh in China (1794–1796): Het Onuitgegeven Journaal Van Zijn Ambassade Naar Peking*. Edited by Frank Lequin. (Alphen Aan Den Rijn [the Netherlands]: Canaletto / Repro-Holland, 2005).
- ITPC1 Lequin, Frank. *De particuliere correspondentie van Isaac Titsingh (1783–1812)*. vol 1. (Alphen aan den Rijn [the Netherlands]: Canaletto, 2009).
- ITVT Titsingh, Isaac. *Varia Titsinghiana. Addenda & corrigenda*. Edited by Frank Lequin. Titsingh Studies no. 6. (Leiden: Titsingh Institute, 2013).
- JAVB Briefwisseling tussen de Schout bij nacht J. P. van Braam, wonende te Zwolle, en diens zoon J. A. van Braam, assistent carga van de directe Chinese handel te Canton, 1795–1798. Scheepvaartmuseum, Amsterdam, the Netherlands, inventory number S.3641, in typescript, 2 vols.
- NEDERBURGH Nationaal Archief Nederland, The Hague, Collectie Nederburgh (1.10.59).
- NIEUHOFF, *Embassy* Joan Nieuhoff, *An Embassy from the East-India Company of the United Province to the Grand Tartar Cham Emperour of China*. Deliv. by Peter de Goyer and Jacob de Keyzer (London: John Macock, 1669).
- NIEUHOFF, *Gezantschap* Johan Nieuhoff, *Het Gezantschap der Neêrlandsche Oost-Indische Compagnie, aan den grooten Tartarischen Cham, den tegenwoordigen Keizer van China ...* (Meurs, the Netherlands: Jacob van Meurs, 1665).
- OIC Comité tot de Zaken van de Oost-Indische Handel en Bezittingen, Dutch National Archives, The Hague, the Netherlands. Nummer archiefinventaris: 2.01.27.01
- QJZ Zhongguo di yi li shi dang an guan 中國第一歷史檔案館, *Qianlong di qi ju zhu* 乾隆帝起居注, 42 vols. (Guilin, China: Guangxi Normal University Press, 2002).
- QLYZS Qianlong Emperor 乾隆帝, *Yuzhishi* 御製詩, Siku quanshu 四庫全書 version. Accessible online at [https://zh.wikisource.org/wiki/御製詩_\(四庫全書本\)](https://zh.wikisource.org/wiki/御製詩_(四庫全書本)), retrieved October 19, 2020.
- RAB Raad der Aziatische Bezittingen, Dutch National Archives, The Hague, the Netherlands. Nummer archiefinventaris: 2.01.27.02.
- VBHAA1 and VBHAA2 Van Braam Houckgeest, Andreas Everardus. *An Authentic Account of the Embassy of the Dutch East-India Company, to the Court of the Emperor of China, in the Years 1794 and 1795*. 2 vols. (London: R. Phillips, 1798).
- VBHJ1 and VBHJ2 Van Braam Houckgeest, Andreas Everardus. “Journaal gehouden Gedurende de Rijze der Hollandse Ambassade naar Peking in 1794/5.” 2 vols. Leiden University East Asian Library. Archiefkast 3, Plank C, Or 20 0 (21.5 × 14 cm).
- VBHM1 and VBHM2 Van Braam, Everardus van Braam Houckgeest. “Memoriaal Wegens de Ambassade der Nederlandsche Oost-Indische Compagnie naar den Kijzer van China in de Jaaren 1794/5. Benevens De Beschrijving der Rijzen bij die Gelegenheid door Verschijdene Onbekende Deelen van dat Rijk Gedaan. In Dagelijxe Aantekeningen Zamengesteld door Andreas Gerardus van Braam Houckgeest. Chef der Nederlandsche Directie in China & Tweede bij Gemelde Ambassade.” 2 vols. Leiden University East Asian Library, Archiefkast 3, Plank C, Or 20 0 2.
- VBHV1 and VBHV2 Van Braam Houckgeest, André Everard. *Voyage De L’ambassade De La Compagnie Des Indes Orientales Hollandaises, Vers L’empereur De La Chine, Dans Les Années 1794 & 1795*. 2 vols. (Philadelphia: M.L.E. Moreau de Saint-Méry, 1797 and 1798).

NOTES

Prologue

1. *Qing Gaozong* (Qianlong) *shi lu*, QL59 tenth month, guihai 癸亥 day (ninth day of tenth month).

2. Regarding books, I am excluding primary accounts. Two were published by participants in the years after the mission returned from Beijing: André Everard van Braam Houckgeest, *Voyage De L'ambassade De La Compagnie Des Indes Orientales Hollandaises, Vers L'empereur De La Chine, Dans Les Années 1794 & 1795*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: M.L.E. Moreau de Saint-Méry, 1797 and 1798) (these two volumes are cited as VBHV1 and VBHV2 in subsequent notes; see the Abbreviations section in this book); and Chrétien-Louis-Joseph de Guignes, *Voyage à Péking, Manille et l'Île de France: faits dans l'intervalle des années 1784 à 1801*, 4 vols. (Paris: Treuttel & Würtz, 1808). These primary-source publications have been joined recently by a transcription of the travel report prepared by the main ambassador, Issac Titsingh, which has finally been published thanks to the indefatigable efforts of Frank Lequin: *Isaac Titsingh in China (1794–1796): Het Onuitgegeven Journaal Van Zijn Ambassade Naar Peking*, edited by Frank Lequin (Alphen Aan Den Rijn: Canaletto/Repro-Holland, 2005). As for scholarly works, the most extensive treatments in English are J.J.L. Duyvendak, “The Last Dutch Embassy to the Chinese Court (1794–1795),” *T'oung pao* 34 (1–2) (1938): 1–137; C. R. Boxer, “Isaac Titsingh's Embassy to the Court of Ch'ien Lung (1794–1795),” *T'ien Hsia Monthly* 8 (1) (January 1939): 9–33; Leonard Blussé, *Visible Cities Canton, Nagasaki, and Batavia and the Coming of the Americans* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), pp. 77ff; and Patricia Owens O'Neill, “Missed Opportunities: Late 18th Century Chinese Relations with England and the Netherlands,” PhD dissertation, University of Washington, 1995. In Chinese, the best treatments are Cai Hongsheng 蔡鴻生, “Wang Wengao Helan gongshi jishishi shizheng” 王文誥荷蘭貢使紀事詩釋證, in Cai Hongsheng, ed., *Aomenshi yu Zhong-Xi jiaotong yanjiu* 澳門史與中西交通研究 (Guangdong: Guangdong gaodeng jiaoyu chubanshe, 1998), 217–231; Lin Faqin 林發欽, “Diguo xieyang: Helan shichen De Sheng shihua kaoshu” 帝國斜陽：荷蘭使臣德勝使華考述, *Aomen ligong xuebao* 澳門理工學報, 2013 vol., no. 1: 164–174; Cai Xiangyu 蔡香玉, “Qianlong monian Helan shituan chushi yuanqi” 乾隆末年荷蘭使團出使緣起, *Xueshu yanjiu* 學術研究, 2016 vol., no. 10: 127–135; and Cai Xiangyu 蔡香玉, “Qianlong monian Helan shituan biao wen chongyi shimo” 乾隆末年荷蘭使團表文重譯始末, *Qingshi yanjiu* 清史研究 2018 vol., no. 2: 99–113. Cai Xiangyu is also working on a translation into Chinese of Western sources pertaining to the mission. My intention in this book is to carry forward into the Qianlong era John E. Wills's foundational work on the history of Sino-Dutch diplomatic relations. See John E. Wills, Jr., *Pepper, Guns, and Parleys: The Dutch East India Company and China, 1662–1681* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974); John E. Wills, Jr., *Embassies and Illusions: Dutch and Portuguese Envoys to K'ang-Hsi, 1666–1687* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984). The latter book has a very short passage on the Qianlong-era Dutch embassy, and there is

also a brief account in John E. Wills, Jr., and John L. Cranmer-Byng, *China and Maritime Europe, 1500–1800: Trade, Settlement, Diplomacy, and Missions* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 249ff.

3. For instance, scholars have argued that the Macartney mission was the last time that China successfully used the tools of its traditional audience rituals to manage Westerners. For examples, see Mark Elliott, *Emperor Qianlong: Son of Heaven, Man of the World* (New York: Longman, 2009), 139; and Angela Zhang, “Ignorant Gaze: George Macartney’s Negotiation with China in 1793,” MA thesis, University of British Columbia, 2010, 55.

4. See especially Tonio Andrade, “An Accidental Embassy: How Two Minor Dutch Administrators Inaugurated an Alliance with the Manchu Qing Dynasty of China,” *Itinerario* 35(1) (2011): 77–95; and Tonio Andrade, “The Mightiest Village: Geopolitics and Diplomacy in the Formosan Plains, 1623–1636,” in Pan Inghai 潘英海 and Chan Suchuan 詹素娟, eds., *Ping pu zu qun yu Taiwan li shi wen hua lun wen ji* 平埔族群與臺灣歷史文化論文集, (Taipei: Academia Sinica Press, 2001), 287–317.

5. A Portuguese embassy of 1752 was also treated very well, although the Portuguese appear not to have enjoyed quite the same access and intimate tours as the Dutch did in 1795, partly because the Qianlong emperor relaxed restrictions on envoys’ access to the Yuanming Gardens in the 1780s and 1790s. The 1752 Portuguese embassy is a fascinating case, worthy of its own book-length study. See João José Cúcio Frada, “Notícias da viagem e da missão diplomática de um embaixador Português á China em 1752,” *Acta Médica Portuguesa* 1994 vol., no. 7: 649–653; A. M. Martins do Vale, “A Embaixada enviada pelo rei dom José I ao imperador Qianlong, em 1752, vista pelo procurador das missões estrangeiras de Paris em Macau,” *Anais de História de Além-Mar* 5(2004): 509–536; Annalyn Beus, “Translation and Transcription of a Passage from the Baduem Manuscript: An Eighteenth-Century Portuguese Embassy to China,” MA thesis, Brigham Young University (Provo, UT), 2013, <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/etd/4016/>, retrieved October 19, 2020; Eugenio Menegon, “The Representation of Power and the Power of Representation: Sino-Portuguese Relations and Catholic Missions in the Yongzheng (1723–1735) and Qianlong (1736–1796) Periods,” in Carlos Eduardo Mendes de Moraes and Ricardo Mgalhães Bulhões, eds., *Capítulos Lusoamericanos* (São Paulo: UNESP-Campus de Assis, 2009), 11–28; António Vilhena de Carvalho, “Nós os franceses mais quisemos ver toda a sua cabeça: dois relatos e uma embaixada a Pequim (Pacheco de Sampaio, 1753),” *Oriente Ocidente* 32 (2015): 42–52; Jorge dos Santos Alves, “Natureza do Primeiro Ciclo de Diplomacia Luso-Chinesa (séculos XVI a XVIII),” *Um Porto entre dois Impérios: estudos sobre Macau e as relações luso-chinesas*, Instituto Português do Oriente, 1999; Francisco Pacheco e Sampaio, *Noticias das couzas succedidas na Embaixada que levou á corte de Pekim Francisco de Assiz Pacheco de Sampaio, mandado pelo Senhor Rey D. Jozé I no anno de 1752* (Lisbon: Livraria Pacheco, 1936); José Freire de Monterroio Mascarenhas, *Notícia da Viagem que fez do Rio de Lisboa na Nau Europa, a 23 de Fevereiro de 1752, até à Praça de Macau, onde chegou a 5 de Agosto, Francisco Xavier de Assis Pacheco e Sampaio, Cavaleiro da Ordem de Cristo, Ministro do Conselho Ultramarino e Embaixador Extraordinário de Sua Magestade Fidelíssima ao Imperador da China* (Lisbon: Oficina de Pedro Ferreira [Impressor da Augustíssima Rainha Nossa Senhora], 1753); José Freire de Monterroio Mascarenhas, *Relação da jornada, que fez ao Imperio da China, e summaria noticia da embaixada, que deo na Corte de Pekim em o primeiro de Mayo de 1753, o Senhor Francisco Xavier Assiz Pacheco e Sampaio.... escrita a hum padre da Companhia de Jesus, assistente em Lisboa, pelo Reverendo Padre Newielhe Francez, da mesma Companhia* (Lisbon: Heirs of Antonio Pedrozo Galram, 1754); Jean Sylvain de Neuville, *Relação Da Jornada, Que Fez Ao Imperio Da China: E Summaria Notícia Da Embaixada Que Deo Na Corte De Pekim Em O Primeiro De Mayo De 1753, O Senhor Francisco Xavier Assiz Pacheco E Sampaio*. (Lisbon: Na Officina dos Herd. de A. Pedrozo Galram, 1754).

6. James Hevia, *Cherishing Men from Afar: Qing Guest Ritual and the Macartney*

Embassy of 1793 (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995), 113; Matthew Mosca, *From Frontier Policy to Foreign Policy: The Question of India and the Transformation of Geopolitics in Qing China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2013), 147–156.

7. On European criticism of the Macartney mission, see Laurence Williams's delightful article, "British Government under the Qianlong Emperor's Gaze: Satire, Imperialism, and the Macartney Embassy to China, 1792–1804," *Lumen* 32 (2013): 85–107. On Macartney's and his comrades' frustrations, and whom they blamed, see Hao Gao, "Going to War against the Middle Kingdom? Continuity and Change in British Attitudes towards Qing China (1793–1840)," *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 45 (2017): 210–231.

8. On the evolution of British antagonism to China, see Hao Gao, "Going to War;" and Hao Gao, *Creating the Opium War: British Imperial Attitudes towards China, 1792–1840* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2020).

9. The literature of this supposed diplomatic incommensurability is vast. Some use terms like "collision of civilizations" or "clash of cultures" in their titles, such as Alain Peyrefitte, *The Collision of Two Civilisations: The British Expedition to China in 1792–4* (London: Harvill, 1993); Alain Peyrefitte, *L'empire Immobile, Ou, Le Choc Des Mondes: Récit Historique* (Paris: Fayard, 1989); J. L. Cramner-Byng and T. H. Levere, "A Cast Study in Cultural Collision: Scientific Apparatus in the Macartney Embassy to China," *Annals of Science* 38 (1981): 503–525. The term "clash of cultures" also appears in Michael Keevak, *Embassies to China: Diplomacy and Cultural Encounters before the Opium Wars* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 2. Other representative works include William Rockhill, *Diplomatic Audiences at the Court of China* (London: Luzac & Co., 1905); J. K. Fairbank, "Tributary Trade and China's Relations with the West," *Far Eastern Quarterly* 1(2) (1942): 129–149; Mark Mancall, "The Ch'ing Tribute System: An Interpretive Essay," in John K. Fairbank, ed., *The Chinese World Order* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1968), 63–89; David Kang, "Hierarchy and Legitimacy in International Systems: The Tribute System in Early Modern East Asia," *Security Studies* 19, no. 4 (December 2010): 591–622. The notion is also found in a very nuanced way in the work of John E. Wills, Jr., including Wills, ed., *China and Maritime Europe, 1500–1800: Trade, Settlement, Diplomacy, and Missions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); and John E. Wills, Jr., *Embassies and Illusions: Dutch and Portuguese Envoys to K'ang-hsi, 1666–1687* (Cambridge, MA: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1984).

10. On Qing imperial perspectives, see Hevia, *Cherishing*. Hevia eschews talk of Europe versus China or East versus West and instead focuses on the ways that two distinct imperial formations—Great Britain and the Qing empire—engaged with each other based on their own discursive systems. Henrietta Harrison's work challenges the culture-clash paradigm by focusing on Qing self-interest, both geopolitical and economic. See Henrietta Harrison, "The Qianlong Emperor's Letter to George III and the Early-Twentieth-Century Origins of Ideas about Traditional China's Foreign Relations," *American Historical Review* 122 (3) (2018): 680–701; and Henrietta Harrison, "Chinese and British Diplomatic Gifts in the Macartney Embassy of 1793," *English Historical Review* 133 (560) (2018): 65–97. Jack Wills also criticized the culture-clash model, softening, late in his life, a position he once held about incompatible "illusions" and the tribute system. For example, see J. E. Wills, Jr., "Functional, Not Fossilized: Qing Tribute Relations with Dai Viet and Siam," *T'oung Pao* 98 (2012): 439–478, esp. 441–442. On Qing geopolitical flexibility, see James Millward, *Beyond the Pass: Economy, Ethnicity, and Empire in Qing Central Asia, 1759–1864* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999). On the importance of frontiers in Qing diplomacy, see Matthew W. Mosca, *From Frontier Policy to Foreign Policy: The Question of India and the Transformation of Geopolitics in Qing China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2013); and Carl Déry, "La Chine face à l'Angleterre et la Russie aux XVIIe–XVIIIe siècles: Évaluation comparative des attitudes de la dynastie Qing sous l'angle des modalités de l'actualisation frontalière,"

PhD thesis, Université Laval, Quebec City, Canada, 2015. Another excellent study on Qing flexibility in foreign relations is Mary Wright, "The Adaptability of Ch'ing Diplomacy: The Case of Korea," *Journal of Asian Studies* 17(3) (1958): 363–381. As for challenges to traditional Westphalian models and periodizations of diplomacy, see Christian Windler, "From Social Status to Sovereignty: Practices of Foreign Relations from the Renaissance to the Sattelzeit," in Tracey A. Sowerby and Jan Hennings, eds., *Practices of Diplomacy in the Early Modern World* (Abingdon-on-Thames, UK: Routledge, 2019); Christian Windler, *La diplomatie comme expérience de l'autre: consuls français au Maghreb, 1700–1840* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 2002); Barry Buzan and George Lawson, "Rethinking Benchmark Dates in International Relations," *European Journal of International Relations*, 20(2) (2014): 437–462; and a special issue of *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 38(1) (2008), especially Anthony Cutler's article "Significant Gifts: Patterns of Exchange in Late Antique, Byzantine, and Early Islamic Diplomacy" (79–101), which, among other things, challenges the supposed distinction between "ritual" and "business" in European diplomacy. For a study of Dutch diplomatic practices being influenced by non-European practices outside of East Asia, see Erica Heinsen-Roach, "Consuls, Corsairs, and Captives: The Creation of Dutch Diplomacy in the Early Modern Mediterranean, 1595–1699," PhD dissertation, University of Miami, 2012.

11. There are numerous examples of currently influential works pervaded by the culture-clash narrative. Most notable are Henry Kissenger, *On China* (New York: Penguin, 2011); John Keay, *China: A History* (New York: Basic Books, 2011); Jonathan Spence, *The Search for Modern China* (New York: Norton, 2012); and Keevak, *Embassies*.

12. "Catastrophic" is from Jürgen Osterhammel, *Unfabling the East: The Enlightenment's Encounter with Asia* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018), p. 146; "distant, scornful, and haughty manner" is from BTC, 143; "freaks of nature" is from Rockhill, *Diplomatic*, 33; "under the threat of the whip" is from Peyrefitte, *Immobile*, 498; "dragged and whipped in very public settings" is from David Edward Banks, "The Politics of Practice: Diplomacy and Legitimacy in International Society," PhD dissertation, George Washington University, Washington, DC, 2015, 178. There are plenty of other negative perspectives. Keevak, for instance, says that the Dutch emissaries "were very ill-treated" (Keevak, *Embassies*, p. 68), and J. L. Cranmer-Byng writes that "the account of their embassy reads like the scenario for a comic film." See J. L. Cranmer-Byng, "Lord Macartney's Embassy to Peking in 1793," *Journal of Oriental Studies* 4 (1, 2) (1957–1958): 117–187, 177.

13. Blussé, *Visible Cities*, p. 85. Two other scholars have advanced quite positive views of the mission: Lequin, ITC; and O'Neill, "Missed Opportunities."

14. BTC, 5–16. In the British edition, John Barrow, *Travels in China* (London: A Strahan, 1804), the attack is on pp. 7–24.

15. BTC, 16.

16. BTC, 14–15.

17. Peyrefitte, *Immobile*, p. 498.

18. DUYVLE, 27. This idea that Titsingh was a dupe is also found in other works, as, for example, in Banks, "Politics of Practice," 178.

19. Boxer, "Isaac Titsingh's Embassy," 9–10.

20. Tonio Andrade, *Lost Colony: The Untold Story of China's First Great Victory over the West* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012), 21–53.

21. Leonard Blussé, "No Boats to China. The Dutch East India Company and the Changing Pattern of the China Sea Trade, 1635–1690," *Modern Asian Studies* 30 (1) (1996): 51–76; Leonard Blussé, "Chinese Trade to Batavia during the days of the V.O.C.," *Archipel* 18 (1979): 195–213; Tonio Andrade, *How Taiwan Became Chinese: Dutch, Spanish, and Han Colonization in the Seventeenth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

22. The Dutch even allied with the Qing, briefly, against the remnants of the Ming

dynasty, a mutual enemy. See Andrade, *Lost Colony*, 312–326; and Andrade, “An Accidental Embassy.”

23. Adam Clulow, *The Company and the Shogun: The Dutch Encounter with Tokugawa Japan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).

24. Leonard Blussé, “Queen among Kings: Diplomatic Ritual at Batavia,” in K. Grijns and P.J.M. Nas, eds., *Jakarta-Batavia: Socio-Cultural Essays* (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2000), 25–41, p. 27.

25. Blussé, “Queen among Kings,” 39. As Blussé would doubtless acknowledge, there were various diplomatic practices and ideals in East and Southeast Asia. See, for example, Sun Laichen, “Imperial Ideal Compromised: Northern and Southern Courts across the New Frontier in the Early Yuan Era,” in James A. Anderson and John K. Whitmore, eds., *China’s Encounters on the South and Southwest : Reforging the Fiery Frontier over Two Millennia* (Leiden, the Netherlands: Brill, 2014), 194–231; Sun Laichen, “Suzerain and Vassal, or Elder and Younger Brothers: The Nature of the Burmo-Chinese Historical Relationship,” Paper delivered at the Association for Asian Studies, 49th meeting, Chicago, March 13–16, 1997; Anthony Reid, “Negotiating Asymmetry: Parents, Brothers, Friends, and Enemies,” in Anthony Reid and Zheng Yangwen, eds., *Negotiating Asymmetry: China’s Place in Asia* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2009), 1–25; John Whitmore, “Northern Relations for Dai Viet: China Policy in the Age of Lê Thanh-tông (r. 1460–1497),” in Anderson and Whitmore, eds., *China’s Encounters on the South and Southwest*, 232–258.

26. Windler, “From Social;” Windler, *Diplomatic*; Buzan and Lawson, “Rethinking;” and Cutler, “Significant Gifts,” which, among other things, challenges the supposed distinction between “ritual” and “business” in European diplomacy. See also Heinsen-Roach, “Consuls.”

27. For instance, the ostensible purpose of Macartney’s mission was “complement and conciliation,” with the emperor’s birthday a focal point. Letter from the chairman and the deputy chair of the East India Company to Henry Browne et al. in Canton, April 25, 1792, in Earl Pritchard, “The Instructions of the East India Company to Lord Macartney on His Embassy to China and His Reports to the Company, 1792–4, Part I: Instructions from the Company,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* 70 (2) (1938): 201–230, pp. 207–208, note 5, quote from p. 208.)

28. Present tense is an unusual choice for historians, although not unprecedented. The work of historian Jonathan Spence is a shining example. See especially *The Question of Hu* (New York: Knopf, 1988); and *God’s Chinese Son: The Taiping Heavenly Kingdom of Hong Xiuquan* (New York: Norton, 1996). For a counterpoint on the use of the present tense, see Bruce Mazlish, “The Question of the Question of Hu,” *History and Theory* 31 (1992): 143–152.

29. Frank Lequin, *Isaac Titsingh (1745–1812): Een passie voor Japan: Leven en werk van de grondlegger van de Europese Japanologie* (Alphen aan den Rijn: Canaletto, 2002), 253–254.

30. His two accounts of the mission—one in manuscript and another, quite different, in print—offer a delightful and acerbic perspective to the more sober (but often humorous) account of Titsingh and the self-aggrandizing accounts left by Van Braam (GAJVP, GVP1, GVP2, GVP3, GVP4). He was the only one of the three who actually knew any Chinese, although his transliterations are sometimes baffling, being inflected both by his Frenchness and the fact that his Chinese tended to be Cantonese. On his authorship of GAJVP, see the section of this book, “A Note on Place Names, Transliterations, Terms, and Sources.”

31. See the excellent work of Cai Xiangyu, cited above, especially Cai, “Qianlong monian Helan shituan chushi yuanqi,” and Cai, “Qianlong monian Helan shituan biao wen chongyi shimo.”

32. Unusual, but not unprecedented. Catholic missionaries traveling from Macau to Beijing sometimes took this route. See, for instance, Eugenio Menegon, “Desire, Truth,

and Propaganda: Lay and Ecclesiastical Travelers from Europe to China in the Long Eighteenth Century,” in Roberta Micallef, ed., *Illusion and Disillusionment: Travel Writing in the Modern Age* (Boston: Ilex Foundation, 2018), 11–41.

33. Anonymous 1 (in Canton), letter to Manuel de Agote in Macau, May 17, 1795, DMA, 1795 (R. 637). I believe that this is by Guignes, because it accords with other writings of his.

34. It's not clear which edition they had. The first edition is Johannes Nieuhof, *Het gezantschap der Neêrlandsche Oost-Indische Compagnie, aan den grooten Tartarischen Cham, den tegenwoordigen keizer van China* (Amsterdam: Jacob van Meurs, 1665). The English edition is Johan Nieuhof, *An Embassy from the East-India Company of the United Province to the Grand Tartar Cham Emperour of China. Deliv. by Peter de Goyer and Jacob de Keyzer* (London: John Macock, 1669). (These two references are subsequently cited as Nieuhof, *Gezantschap* and Nieuhof, *Embassy*; see the Abbreviations section of this book.)

35. Charles Le Gobien, Jean-Baptiste Du Halde, et al., *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses ...*, 34 vols. (Paris, 1703–1776). Even more influential was a digest version Du Halde published: *Description Géographique, Historique, Chronologique, Politique, et Physique de l'Empire de la Chine et de la Tartarie Chinoise*, 4 vols. (Paris: P.-G. le Mercier, 1735).

36. Voltaire, *Lettres philosophiques*, Letter 11, in Voltaire, *Oeuvres complètes de Voltaire*, vol. 22 (Paris: Garnier, 1879), 111–116, p. 115.

37. John Barrow, *The Life of George Lord Anson* (London: John Murray, 1839), p. 72. The process of Dutch reevaluation of their missionary-influenced views is an example of what Osterhammel calls the “unfabling” of the East (Osterhammel, *Unfabling*) and parallels a similar but much more severe process of disillusionment among the members of the Macartney mission. See Hao Gao, “British-Chinese Encounters: Changing Perceptions and Attitudes from the Macartney Mission to the Opium War (1792–1840),” PhD dissertation, University of Edinburgh, 2013, esp. 17–72. See also Alexander Statman, *A Global Enlightenment: Western Progress and Chinese Science* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, forthcoming).

38. Chrétien-Louis-Joseph de Guignes, *Observations sur le voyage de M. Barrow a la Chine en 1794; Imprimé a Londres, en Mai 1804, Lues à l'Institut, par M. de Guignes* (Paris: Imprimerie de Dentu: [probably 1809]), p. 6–7.

39. Guignes, *Observations*, 6–7.

40. Guignes, *Observations*, 50.

41. See, for instance, Alexander Statman, “The Tarot of Yu the Great: The Search for Civilization's Origins between France and China in the Age of Enlightenment,” in Paula Findlen, ed., *Empires of Knowledge: Scientific Networks in the Early Modern World* (London: Routledge, 2019), 246–268; Alexander Statman, “Fusang: The Enlightenment Story of the Chinese Discovery of America,” *Isis* 107 (1) (2016): 1–25; and Alexander Statman, “A Forgotten Friendship: How a French Missionary and a Manchu Prince Studied Electricity and Ballooning in Late Eighteenth Century Beijing,” *East Asian Science, Technology, and Medicine* 46 (2017): 89–118.

42. It was, however, translated into German and Italian. *Reisen nach Peking, Manila und Isle de France in den Jahren 1784 bis 1801*, 3 vols. (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1810); *Viaggi a Pekino, a Manilla ed all'isola de Francia fatti negli anni 1794 al 1801*, 4 vols. (Milan: L. Sonzogno, 1829–1830).

43. ITC.

44. Cai Xiangyu 蔡香玉 is working on one.

Chapter One

1. This is, in any case, how the emperor describes it, in one of his thousands of poems. The Qianlong Emperor, “Yuzhi guan bingxi shi” 御製觀冰嬉詩, in *Guochao gongshi xubian* 國朝宮史續編, Book 22, Juan 67.

2. On physical ailments, see Bai Xinliang 白新良, “Qianlong chuanwei he taishanghuang shenghuo” 乾隆傳位和太上皇生活, *Zijin Cheng* 紫禁城, 1989 Volume (01): 3–5, pp. 3–4. On not hearing well, see Statman, “Forgotten,” 103. On forgetfulness, see Yoon, Wook. “Prosperity with the Help of ‘Villains,’ 1776–1799: A Review of the Heshen Clique and Its Era.” *T’oung Pao* 98 (4/5) (2012): 479–527, pp. 519–520; and “Letter from M. Grammont to Manuel de Agote, from Beijing, 7 October 1791” (could be 1790), in DMA, 1791 (R. 636) (unpaginated—last major item in volume).

3. Qianlong Emperor, Edict of QL59, second month, second day (March 3, 1794), in Qianlong 乾隆, *Qianlongchao shangyudang* 乾隆上諭檔, 18 vols, (Beijing: Zhongguo dang’an chubanshe, Zhongguo diyi lishi dang’anguan, 1991), vol. 17, p. 716 (no. 1657). Versions of this edict can also be found in the QJZ, vol. 41, Qianlong 59, second month, second day (March 3, 1794), pp. 18–19; and in the *Qing Veritable Records* 清實錄, Qianlong vol. 1446 “大清高宗法天隆運至誠先覺體元立極敷文奮武孝慈神聖純皇帝實錄卷之一千四百四十六”. On the lack of precipitation, see Zhang De’er 張德二, ed., *Zhongguo sanqianian qixiang jilu zongji* 中國三千年氣象紀錄總集 5 vols. (Nanjing: Jiangsu jiaoyu 江蘇教育 press, 2013), vol. 3, pp. 2766–2786. There is no entry for Beijing for Qianlong 58, but parts of Tianjin and Hebei suffered drought, although other parts had abundant rain (see esp. p. 2773).

4. Mencius 孟子, Li Lou 離婁下, 54, available at Chinese Text Project, <https://ctext.org/mengzi/li-lou-ii?searchu=天下之言性也，則故而已矣>, retrieved October 19, 2020. My translation is based on that of Myeong-Seok Kim, “An Inquiry into the Development of the Ethical Theory of Emotions in the Analects and the Mencius,” PhD dissertation, Department of Asian Languages and Cultures, Chinese, University of Michigan, 2008, p. 237. The emperor cites this passage when considering the eclipses. Qianlong Emperor, Edict of QL59, second month, second day (March 3, 1794).

5. Qianlong Emperor, Edict of QL59, second month, second day (March 3, 1794).

6. Qianlong Emperor, Edict of QL59, second month, second day (March 3, 1794).

7. Qianlong Emperor, Edict of QL59, second month, second day (March 3, 1794).

8. Macabe Keliher, *The Board of Rites and the Making of Qing China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2019), 9.

9. This account of the promulgation of an edict comes from Joseph Edkins, “Peking,” in Alexander Williamson, ed., *Journeys in North China, Manchuria, and Eastern Mongolia, with Some Account of Corea*, vol. 2 (London: Smith, Elder & Company, 1870), 313–392, esp. pp. 326–328.

10. During the Qianlong period, the Board of Rites office complex was located southwest of the Tian’anmen Gate, not far from the Daqing Gate (大清門). See *Qianlong Jingcheng quantu* (乾隆京城全圖), (Beijing: 1750), vol 11, p. 08, [data set], Japan National Institute of Informatics Digital Silk Road Project, Toyo Bunko, Tokyo, <http://dsr.nii.ac.jp/toyobunko/II-11-D-802/V-11/page/0008.html.en>, retrieved October 19, 2020.

11. Christian Jochim, in his wonderful dissertation, shows how rituals such as these converted “imperial sacred power into a more operational, bureaucratic form,” transmuting charismatic authority (in Weberian terms) into bureaucratic power. Rites like these “existed as a sacred portal connecting the imperial palace complex with the outside world, and the Chinese emperor with those responsible for exercising his imperial will throughout that world.” See Christian Jochim, “Imperial Audience Ceremonies of the Ch’ing Dynasty: A Study of the Ethico-Religious Dimension of the Confucian State,” PhD dissertation, Department of Religion, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, 1980, quotes from p. 132.

Chapter Two

1. This quote is from 1797, but his brother’s perspective is consistent throughout his extant letters. Letter from J. P. van Braam in Ittersum bij Zwolle to his son J. A. van

Braam in Canton, November 16, 1797, in JAVB, vol. 1, pp. 37–42, 42.

2. Letter from Everardus van Braam Houckgeest in Batavia to S. C. Nederburgh in Amsterdam, April 30, 1790. In Nationaal Archief Nederland, The Hague, Collectie Nederburgh (1.10.59), Nederburgh 453, unfoliated.

3. Letter from Van Braam in Canton to the Gemagtigden van de Vergadering van 17 gecommiteerd tot het Bestier van den Directen Vaart en Handel naar China in Amsterdam February 20, 1794, OIC 194: unfoliated.

4. Letter from Van Braam in Canton to the Gemagtigden van de Vergadering van 17 gecommiteerd tot het Bestier van den Directen Vaart en Handel naar China in Amsterdam February 20, 1794, OIC 194: unfoliated.

5. VBHV2, 325.

6. Letter of VBH in Canton to the Governor-General of the VOC in Batavia, November 28, 1792, cited in FVBH1, 71–72.

7. Although sources recording this visit—Dutch, British, and Spanish—don't identify the “Namhoyen” (Magistrate of Nanhai County 南海縣知縣) by name, the office was at this time occupied by Zhao Hongwen 趙鴻文, who served in the capacity from 1792 to 1795. See Zhengxie Nanhaixian weiyuanhui wenshizu 政協南海縣委員會文史組, “Qingchao zhi Minguo Nanhaixian liren zhixian, xianzhang minglie” 清朝至民國南海縣歷任知縣、縣長名列, *Nanhai wenshi ziliao* 南海文史資料, vol. 2, number 7 (1983): 90–94, p. 92.

8. Cai Wenguan 蔡文觀, also known as Cai Shiwen 蔡世文.

9. There are many excellent studies of the Hang merchants and their travails, but my favorite are by Paul Van Dyke. On Monqua, see Paul Van Dyke, *Merchants of Canton and Macau*, vol. 2 (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2016), esp. 43–57.

10. See, for example, November 1795, in DMA, 1795, 37. No pagination, about three-fifths of the way down.

11. On the population of Guangdong, see Lin Youneng 林有能, “Qingdai Guangdong renkou pengzhang yuanyin ji qi yingxiang” 清代廣東人口膨脹原因及其影響, *Xueshu yanjiu* 學術研究 1997 vol., no. 9: 63–67; Huang Qichen 黃啟臣, “Ming-Qing shiqi Guangdong renkou yu tiandi de biantong” 明清時期廣東人口與田地的變動, *Xueshu yanjiu* 學術研究 1987 vol., no. 3: 46–53.

12. Canton Dagregister, December 1, 1793 to January 12, 1795, OIC 195: 351–485, 402–403.

13. Canton Dagregister, December 1, 1793 to January 12, 1795, OIC 195: 351–485, 402–403.

14. Letter from Everardus van Braam Houckgeest in Canton to the General Commissioners of the Indies in Batavia, April 6, 1794, RAB 253, unfoliated. A French translation can be found in VBHV2, 357–364, quote pp. 357–358.

15. VBHV2, 357–364, quote pp. 357–358.

16. VBHV2, 357–364, quote pp. 357–358.

17. VBHV2, 357–364, quote p. 358.

18. VBHV2, 357–364, quote p. 360.

19. Letter from Everardus van Braam Houckgeest in Canton to the General Commissioners of the Indies in Batavia, April 6, 1794, in VBHV1, 357–364, quote p. 363.

20. VBHV2, 357–364, quote p. 362.

21. VBHV2, 357–364, quote pp. 362–363.

22. Letter from Henry Browne, Chief of English Factory, in Canton to Isaac Titsingh in Canton, November 20, 1794, in ITVT, 175–176.

23. He goes on to say, “I think however nothing is more probable than that Monqua in order to secure Mr Van Braam's compliance might speak of it as a measure absolutely resolved on.” Letter from Henry Browne, Chief of English Factory, in Canton to Isaac Titsingh in Canton, November 20, 1794, in ITVT, 175–176.

24. Canton Dagregister, December 1, 1793 to January 12, 1795, OIC 195: 351–485, 381.

25. Van Braam's letter to Agote was dated April 2: Letter from Andreus Everardus

van Braam Houckgeest in Canton to Manuel de Agote in Macau, April 2, 1794, in ITVT, 178; Agote's reply (from Macau) is dated April 5, the same day Van Braam wrote his letter to Batavia. There's no way it would have arrived in Canton in time. Letter from Manuel de Agote in Macau to Van Braam Houckgeest in Canton, April 5, 1794, in DMA, November 1794, R. 636, folio 76v.

Chapter Three

1. On Titsingh's views of European rulership and the desirability of preventing non-Europeans from leadership positions, see Frank Lequin, *Isaac Titsingh, Opperhoofd van Japan: Drie Geschriften als Filosoof, Diplomaat, en Koopman* (Alphen aan den Rijn, Netherlands: Canaletto, 2011), p. 32, notes 38 and 44.

2. Isaac Titsingh, *Bijzonderheden over Japan* (The Hague: De Weduwe J. Allart, 1824), 2.

3. Letter from Isaac Titsingh in Chinsurato Johan Frederik van Rheede in Deshima, April 30, 1787, in ITPC1, 119–122, 120.

4. Titsingh took advantage of his wealth and position to supply himself with sexual companions, and he also enjoyed hearing about his friends' sexual adventures. It's clear from their correspondence that this kind of sexual exploitation was conducted openly. See, for instance, letter from Issac Titsingh in Deshima to Hendrik Andries Ulps in Batavia, June 1785, in ITPC1, 51 and 53. It also appears that they sought out very young sexual partners. See, for example, the diary of sexual (and other) experiences that Hendrik Casper Romberg kept at Titsingh's behest, Hendrik Casper Romberg, "Observations journaliers depuis le 30 nov. 1788 jusqu'au 30 1789," in ITPC1, esp. 303, 304, 305, 306, 308, 309.

5. As he once wrote, when living in Bengal, "although I have a daily opportunity to get everything beautiful, one amuses himself nowhere better than in Japan." Cited in Frank Lequin, "Isaac Titsingh's Private Correspondence (1783–1812) as the reflection of an enlightened 'voyageur philosophique,'" *Tokyo Daigaku Shiryō Hensanjo kenkyū kiyo* 東京大学史料編纂所研究紀要 / 東京大学史料編纂所 編 17 (3): 1–22, 13.

6. There is evidence that she was a child when he first became involved with her. See Johan Frederik van Rheede tot de Parkeler in Deshima to Isaac Titsingh in Chinsura, 24 November 1785, in ITPC1, 62. For her angry drunken episodes, see Romberg, "Observations," in ITPC1, 313–314 and 319–320.

7. Letter from Isaac Titsingh in Chinsura to Jan Titsingh in Amsterdam, January 14, 1791, ITPC1, 119–122, 270.

8. Letter from Isaac Titsingh in Batavia to Jan Titsingh in Amsterdam, October 28, 1792, ITPC1, 350.

9. Letter from Isaac Titsingh in Batavia to Jan Titsingh in Amsterdam, February 16, 1794, ITPC1, 389.

10. Letter from Isaac Titsingh in Batavia to Adriaan Boesses in Haarlem, December 10, 1793, ITPC1, 372–376, 374.

11. Titsingh, *Philosophical Discourse*, cited in Lequin, "Isaac Titsingh's Private," 14.

12. On the pipe from Okimine, see ITPC1, 122.

13. Letter from Isaac Titsingh in Batavia to Jan Titsingh in Amsterdam, October 28, 1792, ITPC1, 352.

14. ITPC1, 393.

15. It sounds better in French: L'homme propose. Dieu dispose. Isaac Titsingh in Batavia to Jan Titsingh in Amsterdam, August 13, 1794, ITPC1, 397–400, 397.

16. Kutsuki Masatsuna in Edo to Isaac Titsingh in Chinsura, April 4, 1789, ITPC1, 202.

17. Kutsuki Masatsuna in Edo to Isaac Titsingh in Chinsura, April 4, 1789, ITPC1, 202.

18. George Staunton, *An Authentic Account of an Embassy from the King of Great Britain to the Emperor of China* ... , vol. 1 (London: W. Bulmer and Co., 1797), 258.

19. Even the Chinese inhabitants of Batavia talked of the famous carriages brought by Macartney to China. See the *Kai ba lidai shiji* 開吧歷代史記, entry under Qianlong 58, in *The Chinese Annals of Batavia, the Kai Ba Lidai Shiji and Other Stories*, translated, edited, and annotated by Leonard Blussé and Nie Dening (Leiden: Brill, 2018). On reactions to the British expedition's stagecoaches in China, see Staunton, *Authentic*, vol. 2, 169.

20. George Thomas Staunton, 1781–1859, “Childhood travel diary, 1792 Sept. 15–1793 May 16,” in George Thomas Staunton Papers Collection, Duke University Libraries, Collection Number RL. 11351, 184–185.

21. Isaac Titsingh, Batavia, to Jan Titsingh, Amsterdam, August 13, 1794, in ITPC1, 398–400, 399.

22. Isaac Titsingh, Guangzhou, to Diedericus Hermanus van Rossum, Amsterdam, November 21, 1794, in ITPC1, 405. The captain of this ship expressed a similar opinion: Letter from Captain Gas to Dozy, January 6, 1795, OIC 195: 811. On ship inspections, etc., see “Berigt wegens ‘t alhier ter rheeде leggende schip Siam gedestineerd over China na Nederland,” dated July 22, 1794, in AGR 1790 (containing resolutions from July 13, 1794–July 29, 1794): 453–454.

23. The Council of the Indies also ensures that the ships receive good cannons for their protection. See Resolution of Friday, July 25, 1794, before midday, GRB 1132 (this inventory number contains resolutions from June 24 through December 30, 1794): 1030ff.

24. ITPC1, 86.

25. See especially IIT, unpaginated.

26. Isaac Titsingh in Batavia to Jan Titsingh in Amsterdam, August 13, 1794, in ITPC1, 398–400, 399.

27. Letter from Isaac Titsingh in Canton, to Jan Titsingh, Amsterdam, November 21, 1794, in ITPC1, 401–405.

Chapter Four

1. Letter from Isaac Titsingh in Canton to Jan Titsingh in Amsterdam, November 21, 1794, in ITPC1, 401–405, 404.

2. Many such requests have been granted this year. See, for example, undated letter from some Chinese to Alting et al., seeking leave to travel to Canton on company ships, Batavia, undated (July 1794), AGR 1790 (containing resolutions from July 13 to July 29, 1794): 53–54. Many others follow, such as folio 159.

3. Isaac Titsingh in Canton to Diedericus Hermanus van Rossum in Amsterdam, November 21, 1794, in ITPC1, 405. The captain of this ship expressed a similar opinion: Letter from Captain Gas to Dozy, January 6, 1795, OIC 195: 811. On ship inspections, etc., see “Berigt wegens ‘t alhier ter rheeде leggende schip Siam gedestineerd over China na Nederland,” dated July 22, 1794, in AGR 1790 (contains July 13–29, 1794): 453–454.

4. Titsingh says it has been cut on purpose; the captain of the ship says it breaks, perhaps to save himself from responsibility for its loss. Letter from Captain G. P. Gas aboard the *Siam* in the Whampoa Roadstead to A. E. van Braam Houckgeest in Canton, November 10, 1794, OIC 195: 735. Cf. Isaac Titsingh in Yingtak to Nederberg, November 26, 1794, in ITPC1, 406–424, 407.

5. Isaac Titsingh in Yingtak to Nederberg, November 26, 1794, in ITPC1, 406–424, 407. The rest of the fleet stays behind, as the authorities vet the Chinese passengers. Canton Dagregister, December 1, 1793 to January 12, 1795, OIC 195: 351–485, 416.

6. Extract of Canton Dagregister, September 19, 1794, in letter from Isaac Titsingh, Canton, to Sebastiaan Cornelis Nederburgh, Batavia, December 20, 1795, in ITPC1, 443–

7. I've supplemented Titsingh's own description of Van Braam's diatribe with information from "Letter from Van Braam in Canton to the Gemagtigden van de Vergadering van 17 gecommiteerd tot het Bestier van den Directen Vaart en Handel naar China in Amsterdam 1794-02-20," OIC 194: unfoliated.

8. Isaac Titsingh in Yingtak to Nederberg, November 26, 1794, in ITPC1, 406–424, 408.

9. IIT, unpaginated.

10. IIT, unpaginated.

11. Letter from J. P. van Braam in Ittersum bij Zwolle to his son J. A. van Braam in Canton, June 27, 1797, in JAVB, vol. 1, pp. 27–35, p. 28.

12. See letter from Isaac Titsingh in London to Johannes Kluppel in Amsterdam, July 3, 1797, in ITPC1, 489–490; and letter from Isaac Titsingh in Canton to Sebastiaan Cornelis Nederburgh in Batavia, December 20, 1795, in ITPC1, 438–440.

13. Letter from Isaac Titsingh in London to Johannes Kluppel in Amsterdam, July 3, 1797, in ITPC1, 489–490.

14. Letter from Isaac Titsingh in London to Johannes Kluppel in Amsterdam, July 3, 1797, in ITPC1, 489–490.

15. Letter from Isaac Titsingh in London to Johannes Kluppel in Amsterdam, July 3, 1797, in ITPC1, 489–490.

16. Canton Dagregister, December 1, 1793–January 12, 1795, OIC 195: 351–485, 418.

17. Canton Dagregister, December 1, 1793–January 12, 1795, OIC 195: 351–485, 418.

18. Canton Dagregister, December 1, 1793–January 12, 1795, OIC 195: 351–485, 418.

19. Canton Dagregister, December 1, 1793–January 12, 1795, OIC 195: 351–485, 417.

20. This phrase comes from American sailor Chauncey Fish, in a letter from 1839, but other documents make it clear that Whampoa was miserable for sailors long before then. Evan Lampe, "'The Most Miserable Hole in the Whole World:' Western Sailors and the Whampoa Anchorage, 1770–1850," *International Journal of Maritime History* 22 (1) (2010): 15–40.

21. Thanks to Paul Van Dyke for this information. Personal communication, December 4, 2019.

22. Canton Dagregister, December 1, 1793–January 12, 1795, OIC 195: 351–485, 420–421.

23. Information on Huangpu is drawn from numerous sources, including Osmond Tiffany, *The Canton Chinese, or The American's Sojourn in the Celestial Empire* (Boston: James Munroe and Company, 1849), 134ff; Evan Lampe, "Most Miserable Hole"; William Milburn, *Oriental Commerce: Containing a Geographical Description of the Principal Places in the East Indies, China and Japan* (London: Black, Parry & Co., 1813), 464–465.

24. Tiffany, *Canton Chinese*, 134.

25. Peter Osbeck, *A Voyage to China and the East Indies*, vol. 1 (London: Benjamin White, 1771), 194.

26. These treats are often arranged by the compradors. See Milburn, *Oriental Commerce*, 492.

27. Isaac Titsingh in Yingtak to Nederberg, November 26, 1794, in ITPC1, 406–424, 409–411.

28. Canton Dagregister, December 1, 1793–January 12, 1795, OIC 195: 351–485, 394(?)–400.

29. On Van Braam's first report of Grammont's communication from Beijing, see Canton Dagregister, December 1, 1793–January 12, 1795, OIC 195: 351–485, 361–363.

30. Jean Joseph de Grammont, cited in BTC, 5–6.

31. DMA, 1793, R. 635. No pagination. About four-fifths of the way down.
32. DMA, 1793, R. 635. No pagination. About four-fifths of the way down.
33. See, for example, Harrison, "Qianlong's Letter."
34. Phrases like "importunate demands" appear repeatedly in correspondence about Macartney. For example, the emperor refers to "absurd demands" (妄有干請) in an edict on September 23, and official Guo Shixun excerpts that edict in his reply and mirrors Qianlong's language, with a slight variation, "importunate and absurd demands" (妄有瀆請), in Memorial from Guo Shixun 郭世勳, Governor of Guangdong, 12 October 1793 (QL58, ninth month, eighth day), in *Zhongguo diyi lishi dang'anguan* 中國第一歷史檔案館, *Yingshi Ma'jia'erni fanghua dang'an shiliao huibian* 英使馬戛爾尼訪華檔案史料匯編 (Beijing: Zhongguo xinhua shudian, 1996), 409–410, p. 409. Cf. Alain Peyrefitte and Pierre-Henri Durand, *Un choc de cultures*, tome 1: *La vision des Chinois* (Paris: Fayard, 1992), 341–343, 342.
35. Edict from the Qianlong Emperor, October 2, 1793, excerpted in Memorial from Guo Shixun 郭世勳, Governor of Guangdong, and Suleng'e, Superintendent of Maritime Trade, dated October 17, 1793 (QL58, ninth month, thirteenth day), in *Zhongguo diyi lishi dang'anguan* 中國第一歷史檔案館, *Yingshi Ma'jia'erni fanghua dang'an shiliao huibian* 英使馬戛爾尼訪華檔案史料匯編 (Beijing: Zhongguo xinhua shudian, 1996), 422–424, p. 422. Cf. Peyrefitte, *Vision*, 365–369, 366.
36. "Forced march" is from Memorial from Li Fenghan 李奉翰, October 24, 1793 (QL58, ninth month, twentieth day), in *Zhongguo diyi lishi dang'anguan* 中國第一歷史檔案館, *Yingshi Ma'jia'erni fanghua dang'an shiliao huibian* 英使馬戛爾尼訪華檔案史料匯編 (Beijing: Zhongguo xinhua shudian, 1996), 436. Cf. Peyrefitte, *Vision*, 371.
37. Qianlong Emperor Edict of October 27 (QL58 ninth month, twenty-third day), excerpted in Memorial from Songyun 松筠, Changlin, and Jiqing 吉慶, November 10, 1793 (QL58, tenth month, seventh day), and the memorial itself discusses this as well. *Zhongguo diyi lishi dang'anguan* 中國第一歷史檔案館, *Yingshi Ma'jia'erni fanghua dang'an shiliao huibian* 英使馬戛爾尼訪華檔案史料匯編 (Beijing: Zhongguo xinhua shudian, 1996), 475–478, esp. 477–478. Cf. Peyrefitte, *Vision*, 402–403, p. 402.
38. Letter from Isaac Titsingh in Yingtak to Sebastiaan Cornelis Nederburgh in Batavia, November 26, 1794, in ITVT, 162.
39. Canton Dagregister, December 1, 1793–January 12, 1795, OIC 195: 351–485, 396–397.
40. Canton Dagregister, December 1, 1793–January 12, 1795, OIC 195: 351–485, 394(?)–400.
41. Canton Dagregister, December 1, 1793–January 12, 1795, OIC 195: 351–485, 361–363. For more on Van Braam's feelings about the Macartney mission, see Canton Dagregister, December 1, 1793–January 12, 1795, OIC 195: 351–485, 370.
42. Letter from A.E.V. Braam Houckgeest in Canton to the Commissarissen Generaal over Nederlands Indien in Batavia, January 14, 1794, OIC 195: 837–841, 848–850.
43. Frank Lequin, in ITVT, 161.
44. Letter from Isaac Titsingh in Yingtak to Nederberg, November 26, 1794, in ITPC1, 406–424, 409–411.
45. IIT, unpaginated.
46. My account of the meeting with the superintendent is drawn from two main sources: Letter from Isaac Titsingh in Yingtak to Cornelius Nederberg in Batavia, November 26, 1794, in ITPC1, 406–424; and ITC, 76ff.
47. ITC, 76.
48. *Canton Daily Journal* entry of September 19, 1794, in Canton Dagregister, December 1, 1793–January 12, 1795, National Archives of the Netherlands, OIC 195: 351–485, p. 417. Thanks to Paul Van Dyke for calling this to my attention. Van Dyke notes that the new superintendent took up his post on October 26 and that Suleng'e left for Beijing the day before; in November, an investigation was launched into Suleng'e's administration (Paul Van Dyke, personal communication, December 4, 2019). A letter

from Suleng'e's replacement, Shu Xi (舒璽) indicates that Suleng'e was in charge of collecting maritime customs for the Yuehai region from Qianlong 58, eighth month, twenty-seventh day until QL59 eighth month, twenty-fifth day. See Memorial from Yuehai Customs Supervisor Shu Xi 舒璽, Qianlong 59 tenth month, twenty-second day (November 14, 1794), in *Ming-Qing gong cang Zhong-Xi shangmao dang'an* 明清宮藏中西商貿檔案, vol. 4 (Beijing: Zhongguo dang'an chubanshe, 2010), pp. 1422–1426, pp. 1422–1423.

49. The incident took place in 1792 and 1793, and the details are rather involved. Suffice to say that Van Braam felt that the superintendent disregarded precedent in the process concerning the tax assessment of a recently arrived Dutch ship called the *Zuiderburg*. Van Braam held firm. So did the superintendent. The ship wasn't unloaded, and the company lost money due to the long delay, feeling that the superintendent in effect took the ship hostage. This action seemed to Van Braam and others in the foreign community to be arbitrary and despotic. See, for instance, DMA, January, February, March 1793, R. 635, unpaginated, about one-sixth of the way through; Bataviasche Missive in dato 30 Nov 1793 (i.e., to Batavia from Canton Raad), OIC 193: unfoliated; and VBHV2, 332–334. The British, too, were frustrated by this man's behavior. See Staunton, *Authentic*, vol. 2, 531.

50. ITC, 75.

51. ITC, 76.

52. DUYVLE, 18. I discuss similar perspectives by other scholars in [Chapter 20](#).

53. DUYVLE, 27. See also Banks, "Politics of Practice," 178.

54. "Extract missive geschreeven door de Hoog Edele Ge. s. Commissarissen Generaal over geheel Nederlands India en Cabo de Goede Hoop aan de Hooge Indiasche Regeering, gedateerd Batavia den 9 Julij 1794," OIC 195: 127–132, 129. The phrase "ceremonial embassy" also appears in Titsingh's official instructions: IIT, unpaginated.

55. But not to all: Van Braam's nephew, Jacob Andries van Braam, for instance, can't believe it. See letter from Jacob Andries van Braam in Canton to his father J. P. van Braam in Zwolle, June 15, 1796, in JAVB, vol. 2, pp. 16–27, 17.

56. IIT, unpaginated.

57. Isaac Titsingh in Yingtak to Nederberg, November 26, 1794, in ITPC1, 406–424, 411–412.

58. ITC, 75.

Chapter Five

1. Milburn, *Oriental Commerce*, 466.

2. On the windows, see VBHV2, 322.

3. The remodeling took place between 1772 and 1774, and the lodge was renovated afterward, but its form was still roughly the same in 1794. See Christiaan J. A. Jörg, *Porcelain and the Dutch China Trade* (Berlin: Springer Verlag, 1982), 60.

4. Letter from Isaac Titsingh in Canton to Jan Titsingh in Amsterdam, November 21, 1794, in ITPC1, 401–405, 402. See also letter from Isaac Titsingh in Yingtak to Nederberg, November 26, 1794, in ITPC1, 406–424, 409–411.

5. Letter from Isaac Titsingh in Canton to Jan Titsingh in Amsterdam, November 21, 1794, in ITPC1, 401–405, 402. See also letter from Isaac Titsingh in Yingtak to Nederberg, November 26, 1794, in ITPC1, 406–424, 409–411.

6. William Hickey, *Memoirs: 1745–1809*, vol. 3 (Hurst and Blackett: London, 1925), 285–286, cited in C. R. Boxer, "The Mandarin at Chinsura: Issac Titsingh in Bengal," *Koninklijke Vereeniging Indisch Instituut, Mededeling No. LXXIV, Afdeling Volkenkunde No. 32* (Amsterdam: Indisch Instituut, 1949), 11.

7. ITPC1, elephants: 84; spearing boars from horseback: 87.

8. Letter from Isaac Titsingh in Yingtak to Nederberg, November 26, 1794, in ITPC1, 406–424, 413.

9. Letter from Isaac Titsingh in Yingtak to Nederberg, November 26, 1794, in ITPC1, 406–424, 411–412. British records do suggest their awareness of this fact. Letter from The Committee in Canton to the Honorable the Court of Directors of the United East India Company, January 25, 1795, British Library, Canton Factory Records 1596–1833, G.12 (108) (1794–1795): 173–202.

10. ITC, 77.

11. VBHAA1, 15.

12. See, for example, DMA, 1794, R. 636, folios 66v–67r.

13. VBHAA1, 16–17; ITC, 78.

14. ITC, 78.

15. Letter from Isaac Titsingh in Yingtak to Nederberg, November 26, 1794, in ITPC1, 406–424, 411–412; VBHAA1, 14.

16. VBHAA1, 18–19; letter from Isaac Titsingh in Yingtak to Nederberg, November 26, 1794, in ITPC1, 406–424, 412–413.

17. Letter from Isaac Titsingh in Yingtak to Nederberg, November 26, 1794, in ITPC1, 406–424, 411–412.

18. VBHAA1, 15–16; letter from Isaac Titsingh in Yingtak to Nederberg, November 26, 1794, in ITPC1, 406–424, 412–413.

19. Letter from Isaac Titsingh in Yingtak to Nederberg, November 26, 1794, in ITPC1, 406–424, 412–413.

20. ITC, 77; and VBHAA1, 15.

21. Jörg, *Porcelain*, p. 338, note 66.

22. Letter from Isaac Titsingh in Yingtak to Nederberg, November 26, 1794, in ITPC1, 406–424, 419. Elsewhere, Titsingh expressed similar sentiments: ITC, 79.

23. The British didn't attempt to hide this fact. The mechanisms were made in Germany and redecorated by Benjamin Vulliamy, horologist to King George III. The emperor and court weren't impressed, in any case. As the British discovered, to their surprise, similar pieces already stood in the imperial collection. Henrietta Harrison, "Chinese and British Diplomatic Gifts in the Macartney Embassy of 1793," *English Historical Review* 133 (560) (2018): 65–97, 83.

24. This translation is loose, it being very difficult to render the precise meaning and feeling of the original. For example, "oyster shell mirror" is, literally, just "oyster mirror," and the phrase is separated from "water," to which it refers. Wang Wengao 王文話, *Yunshantang shiji* 韻山堂詩集, juan 1 (Guangxu 40 edition), cited in Cai Hongsheng, "Wang Wengao," 218–219.

25. Wang Wengao, *Yunshantang*, in Cai, "Wang Wengao," 218–219.

26. The red dragons and flag are details not from Titsingh or Van Braam sources, but from other descriptions of official sanpans, such as Peter Osbeck, *A Voyage to China and the East Indies*, vol. 1 (London: Benjamin White, 1771), 195.

27. 潘有度 was known to Westerners as Poankeequa.

28. "Beschaafdheid en wellevendheid," ITC, 79.

29. I'm assuming that the ambassador arrived at the main sea gate (海山門), and I'm using for reference Anonymous Chinese Artists, "Vistas de los santuarios y otros edificios mas remarcables, que comprehende el grande pagode o templo de Canton nombrado Tay-thang-tsu ... recopilada por Manuel de Agote," c. 1796, Private Collection, Bonhams Auction House, <https://www.bonhams.com/auctions/21882/lot/123/?category=list>, retrieved October 19, 2020. Thanks to Bruce Maclaren, Specialist in Chinese Art, Bonhams Auction House for introducing me to this wonderful source.

30. Macabe Keliher, *The Board of Rites and the Making of Qing China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2019), 9.

31. Letter from Isaac Titsingh in Yingtak to Nederberg, November 26, 1794, in ITPC1, 406–424, 414–415.

32. VBHAA1, 21–22.

33. Letter from Isaac Titsingh in Yingtak to Nederberg, November 26, 1794, in ITPC1, 406–424, 413.

34. Zhaolian 昭健, “Xiaoting zalu xulu juan san, mu’an xiangguo tiao” 嘯亭雜錄, 續錄卷三 牧庵相國條, cited in Cai Hongsheng, “Wang Wengao,” 225.

35. Keliher, *The Board of Rites*, 58.

36. Paul Van Dyke notes that the original owner, Chowqua, died in 1789, but his son Locqua (Lopqua in Lequin) took over the business and, as far as we know, was still alive at the time of Titsingh. The garden fell into desuetude, because the firm went bankrupt in 1793, and all of the properties were confiscated and were awaiting settlement by the government. Paul Van Dyke, personal communication, December 4, 2019.

37. Letter from Isaac Titsingh in Yingtak to Nederberg, November 26, 1794, in ITPC1, 406–424, 414.

38. Letter from Isaac Titsingh in Yingtak to Nederberg, November 26, 1794, in ITPC1, 406–424, 415.

39. Memorial from Changlin to Qianlong, October 15, 1794 (Qianlong 59, ninth month, twenty-second day), in Liang Tingnan 梁廷柟 (1796–1861), “Yuedao gongguo shuo” 粵道貢國說, juan 3 (“荷蘭國”), in Liang Tingnan, *Haiguo sishuo* 海國四說 (1846).

40. Memorial from Changlin to Qianlong, October 15, 1794, in Liang, “Yuedao,” juan 3.

41. Memorial from Changlin to Qianlong, October 15, 1794, in Liang, “Yuedao,” juan 3.

42. Letter from Isaac Titsingh in Yingtak to Nederberg, November 26, 1794, in ITPC1, 406–424, 415.

43. ITC, 81.

44. Letter from Isaac Titsingh in Yingtak to Nederberg, November 26, 1794, in ITPC1, 406–424, 416.

45. On Van Braam’s insistence that he is in debt and has a poor idea of his net worth, see letter from Everardus van Braam in Guangzhou to Isaac Titsingh in Canton, November 15, 1794, in ITVT, 181–182.

46. Letter from Isaac Titsingh in Yingtak to Nederberg, November 26, 1794, in ITPC1, 406–424, 416–417.

47. See ITVT, 177–178.

48. Letter from Isaac Titsingh in Yingtak to Nederberg, November 26, 1794, in ITPC1, 406–424, 408.

49. See ITVT, 177–178.

50. DMA, 1794, R. 636, folio 76v.

51. Letter from Henry Browne, chief of English Factory in Canton, to Isaac Titsingh in Canton, November 20, 1794, in ITVT, 175–176. I have changed the term “tsongtoc” (English transliteration of 總督) to “viceroy.”

52. Letter from Henry Browne, chief of English Factory in Canton, to Isaac Titsingh in Canton, November 20, 1794, in ITVT, 175–176.

53. Letter from Isaac Titsingh in Canton to the Commissarissen Generael in Batavia, November 21, 1794, in ITVT, 169–173, quote from p. 170.

54. Letter from Isaac Titsingh in Canton to the Commissarissen Generael in Batavia, November 21, 1794, in ITVT, 169–173, quote from p. 170.

55. He uses the term “Canaan.”

56. Letter from Isaac Titsingh in Canton to Jan Titsingh in Amsterdam, November 21, 1794, in ITPC1, 401–405, 402–403.

57. Letter from Isaac Titsingh in Canton to Jan Titsingh in Amsterdam, November 21, 1794, in ITPC1, 401–405, 402–403.

58. Letter from Isaac Titsingh in Canton to Jan Titsingh in Amsterdam, November 21, 1794, in ITPC1, 401–405, 402–403.

59. Timon Screech, *Japan Extolled and Decried: Carl Peter Thunberg and the Shoguns Realm, 1775–1796* (London: Routledge, 2011), 109.

60. Letter from Isaac Titsingh in Canton to Jan Titsingh in Amsterdam, November 21, 1794, in ITPC1, 401–405, 402–403.

Chapter Six

1. For more on the Grand Council, the best place to start is Beatrice Bartlett's delightful *Monarchs and Ministers: The Grand Council in Mid-Ch'ing China, 1723–1820* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991). On “late meetings,” see p. 174.

2. Memorandum (奏片) from the Grand Council to the Emperor, Qianlong 59, tenth month, ninth day, November 1, 1794, in HLGJ, 368. See translation in DUYVSD, 332–333.

3. Letter from Jean-Baptiste-Joseph de Grammont in Beijing to Manuel de Agote in Macau, October 4, 1795, in DMA, December 1795 (R. 637). Unfoliated, about four-fifths of the way to the end.

4. 西洋官話. Memorandum (奏片) from the Grand Council to the Emperor, Qianlong 59, tenth month, ninth day, (November 1, 1794), in HLGJ, 368. See translation in DUYVSD, 332–333.

5. Memorandum (奏片) from the Grand Council to the Emperor, Qianlong 59, tenth month, ninth day (November 1, 1794), HLGJ, 368. See translation in DUYVSD, 332–333.

6. There is more than one version of this edict, dated Qianlong 59, tenth month, ninth day (November 1, 1794). I rely on the one in the Qing Veritable Records: *Qing Gaozong* (Qianlong) *shi lu*, QL59 tenth month, guihai 癸亥 day (ninth day of tenth month).

7. Imperial Edict, Qianlong 59, tenth month, ninth day (November 1, 1794). *Qing Gaozong* (Qianlong) *shi lu*, QL59 tenth month, guihai 癸亥 day (ninth day of tenth month).

8. Imperial Edict, Qianlong 59, tenth month, ninth day (November 1, 1794). *Qing Gaozong* (Qianlong) *shi lu*, QL59 tenth month, guihai 癸亥 day (ninth day of tenth month).

9. DUYVSD, 333, note 1.

10. Letter from Isaac Titsingh in Yingtak to Nederberg, November 26, 1794, in ITPC1, 406–424, 415.

11. ITPC1, 400.

12. VBHAA1, 27–28.

13. DMA, 1794, R. 636, folio 66r.

14. Letter from Issac Titsingh in Bengal to Kutsuki Matatsuna in Edo, February 26, 1789, in ITPC1, 182–183.

15. Letter from Isaac Titsingh in Chinsura to Katsuragawa Hoshû in Edo, 1786, ITPC1, 82.

16. ITPC1, 115.

17. ITPC1, 204.

18. On Fourmont and his grammar, see Cecile Leunge, *Etienne Fourmont (1683–1745): Oriental and Chinese Languages in Eighteenth-Century France*, Leuven Chinese Studies 13 (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2002).

19. ITPC1, 262. He also writes about this work in ITPC1, 271.

20. Letter from Isaac Titsingh in Chinsurato Kutsuki Masatsuna in Edo, March 10, 1790, in ITPC1, 242.

21. DMA, December 1793, R. 635. No pagination. About four-fifths of the way down.

22. Letter from Isaac Titsingh in Amsterdam to William Marsden in London, February 3, 1809, in ITPC1, 533–535, 534; and letter from Isaac Titsingh in Yingtak to Nederberg, November 26, 1794, in ITPC1, 406–424, 417.

23. On the younger Guignes's time in China, see Henri Cordier, “Le consulat de France à Canton au XVII^e siècle, *T'oung Pao*, series 2, vol. 9 (1908): 47–136; On the arrival in Asia of news of the French Revolution, see ITPC1, 367; On Guignes's threadbare clothing, see letter from Isaac Titsingh in Yingtak to Nederberg, November

26, 1794, in ITPC1, 406–424, 417.

24. ITC, 82.

25. GVP1, 257.

26. See Lin Faqin, “Diguo xieyang.”

27. This part of the conversation is from Guignes’s point of view, and it’s important to note that Titsingh doesn’t mention it. See GVP1, 259. Titsingh and Van Braam suggest that Guignes was hired on—at least initially—as interpreter. Guignes says he was assured he would be serving as secretary. Indeed, he writes about how unhappy he is that Van Braam portrayed him as a mere interpreter, which may be one of the reasons that Guignes ends up hating him. VBHAA1, 32.

28. Guignes’s published account suggests that this visit occurred after the farewell meal of November 20, 1794. Other sources suggest it occurred before, such as VBHM1, 22.

29. GVP1, 258–259.

30. GVP1, 258.

31. Letter from Isaac Titsingh in Canton to Jan Titsingh in Amsterdam, November 21, 1794, in ITPC1, 401–405, 404.

32. VBHAA1, 28.

33. Letter from R. Dozy and the Commercial Raad in Canton to Nederburgh, Frykennis, Alting, and Sieberg, the Commissarissen Generael over geheel Neerlands Indien en Cabo de Goede Hoop, etc., etc., etc., January 11, 1795, OIC: 289–293, 291.

34. Letter from Isaac Titsingh in Yingtak to Nederberg, November 26, 1794, in ITPC1, 406–424, 421.

35. Letter from Isaac Titsingh in Yingtak to Nederberg, November 26, 1794, in ITPC1, 406–424, 421.

36. Letter from Isaac Titsingh in Canton to the General Commissaries of Batavia, January 30, 1796, OIC 196: unfoliated.

37. Letter from Isaac Titsingh in Yingtak to Nederberg, November 26, 1794, in ITPC1, 406–424, 421. See also letter from Isaac Titsingh in Canton to the Commissarissen Generael in Batavia, November 21, 1794, in ITVT, 169–173, quote from p. 171.

38. Letter from Isaac Titsingh in Canton to the Commissarissen Generael in Batavia, November 21, 1794, in ITVT, 169–173, quote from p. 171.

39. Letter from Isaac Titsingh in Yingtak to Nederberg, November 26, 1794, in ITPC1, 406–424, 415.

40. ITPC1, 405.

41. Letter from Isaac Titsingh in Canton to Jan Titsingh in Amsterdam, November 21, 1794, in ITPC1, 401–405, 404.

42. Letter from Isaac Titsingh in Canton to Jan Titsingh in Amsterdam, November 21, 1794, in ITPC1, 401–405, 404.

43. Letter Isaac Titsingh in Yingtak to Nederberg, November 26, 1794, in ITPC1, 406–424, 419–421. See also ITC, 83.

44. Intriguingly, in his letter to Nederburgh, Titsingh says that the viceroy “expresses his concern that we are well supplied with warm clothing.” Letter from Isaac Titsingh in Yingtak to Nederberg, November 26, 1794, in ITPC1, 406–424, 420. Elsewhere, it seems, the viceroy is said to indicate that he himself has supplied warm clothing.

45. Qianlong Emperor, Edict of QL59, tenth month, guihai 癸亥 day (ninth day of tenth month) (November 1, 1794), in HLGJ, 367. Also found in Qing Qianlong Veritable Records. My translation differs from Duyvendak’s in that he rather emphasizes the high-to-low tone, which fits with his interpretation of the mission as a humiliating exercise, a useless mistake. See DUYVLE, 21–25.

46. Letter from Isaac Titsingh in Yingtak to Nederberg, November 26, 1794, in ITPC1, 406–424, 420.

47. VBHAA1, 35.

48. GVP1, 257.
49. Letter from Isaac Titsingh in Yingtak to Nederberg, November 26, 1794, in ITPC1, 406–424, 420; Lequin, *Titsingh in China*, p. 84.
50. Letter from Isaac Titsingh in Yingtak to Nederberg, November 26, 1794, in ITPC1, 406–424.
51. On VBH's laying down his duties, see Canton Dagregister, December 1, 1793–January 12, 1795, OIC 195: 351–485, 440.
52. ITC, 85.
53. GVP1, 262.
54. GVP1, 261.
55. Letter from Isaac Titsingh in Yingtak to Nederberg, November 26, 1794, in ITPC1, 406–424, 419–421.
56. 花地 was often called “Fa-tee” by Westerners.
57. ITC, 85.

Chapter Seven

1. Nieuhof, *Embassy*, 26. It's not clear which edition Titsingh had. See ITC, 17, note 16.
2. GVP1, 262. Guignes complained about the yelling every chance he got. See DMA, November 1794, R. 636, folios 77v–78r.
3. ITC, 85.
4. GVP1, 262
5. Letter from de Guignes to Agote in Macau, DMA, November 1794, R. 636, folios 77v–78r.
6. VBHAA1, 51–52.
7. ITC, 87.
8. Letter from Isaac Titsingh in Yingtak to Nederberg, November 26, 1794, in ITPC1, 406–424, 423–424.
9. Van Braam writes that the mountains are “not to be surpassed by any thing of the same kind in any part of the world.” VBHAA1, 51. GVP1, 270.
10. ITC, 86.
11. VBHAA1, 44–45.
12. GVP1, 267. It's intriguing that the explanation of the name of the pagoda is not present in any of the diary accounts of the voyagers, including de Guigne's own diary. See GAJVP, folio 3v. See also ACJ, 4.
13. Bluish mountains: GVP1, 268; Drinking: ITC, 86; GAJVP, folio 5r; Tigers: GVP1, 268; and GAJVP, folios 5r–5v; ITC, 86.
14. ITC, 86.
15. VBHAA1, 47.
16. ITC, 88. Cf. GVP1, 271; and VBHAA1, 50.
17. VBHAA1, 50.
18. Letter from Isaac Titsingh in Canton to Jan Titsingh in Amsterdam, November 21, 1794, in ITPC1, 401–405.
19. Letter from Isaac Titsingh in Yingtak to Nederberg, November 26, 1794, in ITPC1, 406–424.
20. Letter from Isaac Titsingh in Canton to Jan Titsingh in Amsterdam, November 21, 1794, in ITPC1, 401–405.
21. Letter from Isaac Titsingh in Canton to Jan Titsingh in Amsterdam, November 21, 1794, in ITPC1, 401–405.
22. Letter from Isaac Titsingh in Canton to Jan Titsingh in Amsterdam, November 21, 1794, in ITPC1, 401–405.
23. Nieuhof, *Embassy*, 26.

24. Letter from Isaac Titsingh in Canton to Jan Titsingh in Amsterdam, November 21, 1794, in ITPC1, 401–405.
25. Nieuhof, *Embassy*, 49.
26. GAJVP, folio 6r. See also GVP1, 269–270.
27. Sanshui (三水). I've changed the transliteration to Pinyin. VBHAA1, 40–41.
28. VBHAA1, 40–41.
29. GAJVP, folio 4; GVP1, 266.
30. ITC, 87.
31. Nieuhof, *Embassy*, 54.
32. Current-day Shaoguan 韶關.
33. Staunton, *Authentic*, vol. 2, 512.
34. Staunton, *Authentic*, vol. 2, 512.
35. ITC, 88.
36. GAJVP, folio 8r.
37. ITC, 88; GVP1, 272.
38. Guignes finds boats bigger: GAJVP, folio 8r. Titsingh doesn't like his boat: GVP1, 272.
39. ITC, 88.
40. Number of boats: VBHAA1, 55.
41. GAJVP, folios 8v–9r; GVP1, 273; VBHAA1, 57–58; ITC, 88–89.
42. GVP1, 274–276.
43. Drafty windows, ITC, 89; entertained by soldiers, GAJVP, folio 10r; curious onlookers, GVP1, 276; rushing back to boats, GAJVP, folio 11r; man being carried, GVP1, 277.
44. ITC, 89.
45. GAJVP, folio 33r.
46. VBHV2, 155–156.
47. See Jean-Baptiste Du Halde, *The General History of China: Containing a Geographical, Historical, Chronological, Political and Physical Description of the Empire of China, Chinese-Tartary, Corea, and Thibet*, vol. 2 (London: J. Watts, 1741), 95–96.
48. I've converted from leagues (10 Parisian leagues, at 2.4 miles per league). Du Halde, *General History*, vol. 2, 96.
49. GAJVP, folio 204r.
50. VBHV2, 154.
51. That's what Van Braam's journal says (VBHJ2, 209–210), but the book suggests that six ride in the cart at a time, so that half are working and half resting at any given time. VBHAA2, 97.
52. VBHJ2, 209–210.
53. GVP1, 278–279.
54. GVP1, 282.
55. GAJVP, folio 13; GVP1, 282.
56. GVP1, 282.
57. ITC, 91.
58. GAJVP, folio 13.
59. GVP1, 275; GAJVP, folio 13v; GVP1, 275.
60. ITC, 91.
61. VBHM1, p. 37.
62. VBHAA1, 67–68; VBHM1, p. 37.
63. ITC, 91; GVP1, 283.
64. GVP1, 283–284.
65. VBHAA1, 68.
66. ITC, 91.
67. GVP1, 285–286.
68. GAJVP, folio 14v.

69. Du Halde, *General History*, vol. 2, 88.
70. GVP1, 286.
71. Snaking motion: GAJVP, folio 15v; VBHAA1, 77–78.
72. VBHAA1, 74. Even Guignes admires them: GVP1, 288.
73. VBHAA1, 75.
74. GVP1, 289.
75. VBHAA1, 79–80.
76. It's interesting to note that south of Ganzhou, there are another eighteen shoals, in the 龍頭風景區, near 龍南縣.
77. The poem is excerpted in the *Fangyu huibian* 方輿彙編, in Chen Menglei 陈梦雷, compiler, *Qinding gujin tushu jicheng* 欽定古今圖書集成, v.425:7: juan 296 (方輿彙編/山川典/第296卷), folio 19, available online at <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=nnc1.cu10423605&view=2up&seq=101>, retrieved October 19, 2020. It's not clear who originally authored it.
78. Nieuhof, *Embassy*, 66.
79. Nieuhof, *Embassy*, 66.
80. I'm inferring that the temple here was for 龍王, because Guignes writes, "We passed in front of a customs house, and a pagoda that is called Long-ouang-miao, where all of the Chinese of the boats have the practice of offering sacrifices in order to make the deities favorable at the moment that they pass between the rocks that obstruct the course of the river, and which we would pass the following day." GVP1, 292.
81. The names have changed through the centuries, and it's not always easy to find equivalents among more recent names, especially given the problems of transliteration. The transliterations given in the anonymous Chinese source (probably translated by Guignes) are possible to match with a few of the more recent names, which is where I got the five names I've included in the text. Many others I was unable to match. See ACJ, 9–10.
82. Van Braam's manuscript journal indicates that it was a clear (*helderen*) day. VBHJ1, 29.
83. ACJ, 9–10.
84. VBHAA1, 90.
85. GAJVP, folio 19v.
86. ITC, 95.

Chapter Eight

1. GVP1, 20v–21r.
2. GVP1, 20v–21r.
3. Letter from de Guignes to Agote in Macau, DMA, November 1794, R. 636, folios 77v–78r.
4. DMA, November 1794, R. 636, folio 78r.
5. GVP1, 20v–21r.
6. GVP1, 300.
7. GAJVP, folio 22r. Intriguingly, in his published account, he says he exchanged it with one of the conductors.
8. His official title is Administrative Supervisor of the districts of Nanxiong, Shaozhou, and Lianzhou 南韶連兵備道員.
9. GAJVP, folio 158r.
10. ITC, 96; VBHAA1, 98–99; GVP1, 301–302.
11. VBHAA1, 98–99.
12. GAJVP, folio 22v.
13. ITC, 97.
14. ITC, 97.

15. GAJVP, folios 24r–24v; and GVP1, 304–305.
16. VBHAA1, 99–100.
17. ITC, 97.
18. ITC, 97.
19. ITC, 97–98.
20. GVP1, 306.
21. VBHAA1, 101–102.
22. GVP1, 307.
23. This 回龍塔 (aka 鎖江樓塔) is still standing, having been repaired and restored multiple times.
24. VBHAA1, 103–104.
25. ITC, 98–99.
26. ITC, 98–99.
27. ITC, 99.
28. ITC, 99.
29. GAJVP, folio 28r.
30. VBHJ1, 49.
31. ITC, 99–100.
32. VBHJ1, 54–55.
33. GVP1, 313–314; VBHJ1, 51.
34. GVP1, 311–312.
35. VBHAA1, 110–112.
36. VBHAA1, 111.
37. VBHAA1, 111. Cf. VBHJ1, 53.
38. VBHAA1, 110.
39. The governor (巡撫) of Anhui at this time was 惠齡.
40. VBHJ1, 57–58. Cf. VBHAA1, 118.
41. VBHJ1, 57–58. Cf. VBHAA1, 118.
42. VBHAA1, 123.
43. ITC, 101–102.
44. VBHAA1, 117–124.
45. ITC, 102.
46. VBHAA1, 131–132.
47. GAJVP, folio 32r; and GVP1, 319.
48. ITC, 102.
49. ITC, 102.
50. ITC, 102.
51. ITC, 102–103.
52. GAJVP, folios 32v–33r.
53. ITC, 103.
54. Memorial from Chen Yongfu, Governor of Hubei (湖北巡撫陳用敷摺), the twelfth moon of the fifty-ninth year (乾隆五十九年十二月), in DUYVSD, 335–337. Note that Chen served as governor (巡撫) of Anhui Province until the tenth month of Qianlong 59, after which he became governor of Hubei.
55. According to Van Braam, the old man is the “mandarin of Fong-yong-fou [鳳陽府], who is at the head of the executive power in that province” (VBHAA1, 130). Duyvendak suggests that he must be the “Tao-t’ai Tiao Chih-ch’eng,” who also visited them in Shucheng (DUYVSD, 337, note 2). A Chinese source, however, seems to indicate otherwise. In a memorial from Chen Yongfu, Governor of Hubei (湖北巡撫陳用敷摺), dated the twelfth moon of the fifty-ninth year (乾隆五十九年十二月), Chen Yongfu says that he’s received a report from the provincial judge Enming (臬司恩明), which in turn reports a report (so far as I can tell) from the acting prefect of Luzhou, Fuming (廬州府福明). These reports indicate that Enming and Fuming were responsible for getting food and supplies to the ambassador, and in Shucheng Station, they “hastened the production of good

leather clothing and also food and drink.” (HLGJ, 370–371.)

56. VBHJ1, 67.

57. ITC, 104.

58. VBHAA1, 130.

59. Memorial from Chen Yongfu, governor of Hubei (湖北巡撫陳用敷摺), the twelfth moon of the fifty-ninth year (乾隆五十九年十二月), in DUYVSD, 335–337. My translation diverges from Duyvendak’s in small ways.

60. ITC, 104.

61. ITC, 104–105.

62. VBHAA1, 132.

63. VBHJ1, 70.

64. VBHJ1, 70.

65. VBHJ1, 71; VBHAA1, 134.

66. VBHAA1, 135.

67. VBHAA1, 134–136.

68. GAJVP, folios 35v–36r. “Amazed” is in ITC, 105.

69. GVP1, 325–326.

70. VBHAA1, 137; VBHJ1, 73.

71. VBHAA1, 138–139.

72. GVP1, 327.

73. VBHJ1, 74; VBHAA1, 139.

74. GAJVP, folio 37r.

75. Six hundred toises, or .75 miles. GVP1, 328.

76. GAJVP, folio 37v.

77. ITC, 106.

78. GAJVP, folio 38r.

79. VBHAA1, 143.

80. VBHAA1, 145.

81. VBHAA1, 146.

82. I infer the name of the mountain from the map “Huanghe xiayou zhaba tu” 黃河下游開闢圖 Qianlong period, post 1749, Library of Congress Geography and Map Division (Washington, DC), call number G2307.Y4 H8 1749, <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.gmd/g7822ym.gct00233>, retrieved December 20, 2017. The name of the tower is from the map “Liusheng Huanghe saoba hedao quantu” 六省黃河埽壩河道全圖, created between 1824 and 1825, Library of Congress Geography and Map Division (Washington, DC), G7822.Y4N22 1825 .L5, <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.gmd/g7822ym.gct00258>, retrieved December 20, 2017.

83. GVP1, 332–333.

84. GVP1, 333–334.

85. GAJVP, folio 40v.

86. GAJVP, folio 41r–41v.

87. Guignes estimates it at 300–400 toises, or 1,800 to 2,400 feet (GVP1, 334).

88. GAJVP, folio 41r–41v.

89. VBHM1, p. 75.

90. See Donald F. Lach, *Asia in the Making of Europe, Volume II: A Century of Wonder* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 401–403.

91. This phrase is from the French scholar Peiresc, quoted in Eileen Reeves, *Evening News: Optics, Astronomy, and Journalism in Early Modern Europe* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014), 218. When Peiresc rode, Maurice of Nassau was not yet Prince of Orange, a title he would inherit in 1618.

92. My free (and loose) translation is based on a delightful Dutch rendition of the original Latin:

Door de winden voortgedragen
Langs de golven, op den grond,
Geef my enkel zulk een wagen,

En ik vaer den aerdbol rond.

—From Prudens van Duyse, *De Zeilwagen van Simon Stevin, naer de Latijnsche Gedichten van Hugo Grotius* (Gent: C. Annoot-Braekman, 1846), 23.

93. “De Zeilwagen van Stevin,” *De Navorscher*, vol. 13, Nieuwe Reeks, 3e Jaargang (Amsterdam: C.M. van Gogh, 1863), 109.

94. VBHAA1, 152–153.

95. GAJVP, folios 42v–43r.

96. Instructions from the Grand Council to Wang Shiji 王仕基 and his colleagues of the nineteenth day of the twelfth moon (January 9, 1795). HLGJ, 376–377. Also see DUYVSD, 341–342.

97. Instructions from the Grand Council to Wang Shiji 王仕基 and his colleagues of the nineteenth day of the twelfth moon (January 9, 1795). HLGJ, 376–377. Also see DUYVSD, 341–342.

98. ITC, 109–110.

99. GAJVP, folio 44r.

100. GVP1, 341.

101. VBHAA1, 155–156.

102. GVP1, 341.

103. VBHAA1, 155–156.

104. ITC, 112.

105. ITC, 113.

106. Guignes’s woes with porters in Shandong are described in GAJVP, folios 48v–49r; and GVP1, 346–347.

107. GAJVP, folios 49v–50r.

108. Note that technically, Beizhili was not a province but a “directly-ruled” zone, under the control of the imperial capital.

109. ITC, 114.

110. ITC, 114.

111. VBHAA1, 168.

112. GVP1, 350–351.

113. GAJVP, folio 50v–51r.

114. GVP1, 350–351.

115. VBHAA1, 169.

116. ITC, 115.

117. ITC, 14.

118. GVP1, 355.

119. GVP1, 355.

120. ITC, 115.

121. GVP1, 353–354.

122. ITC, 115.

123. ITC, 115–116.

124. Cited in James Flath, “Setting Moon and Rising Nationalism: The Lugou Bridge as Monument and Memory,” in *Beyond Suffering: Recounting War in Modern China*, edited by James Flath, and Norman Smith (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2011), 242–262, p. 242.

125. VBHAA1, 173–174. I have altered the translation slightly, using “proximity” instead of “vicinage.”

126. They pass through the Guang’an Gate 廣安門.

127. VBHM1, p. 86. Cf. VBHAA1, 175.

128. VBHAA1, 176–178.

129. ITC, 118.

130. GVP1, 357–358.

131. “Frappe si tu l’oses!” GAJVP, folio 57r.

132. GVP1, 359–360.

133. GAJVP, folio 57r.

Chapter Nine

1. ITC, 118–119.

2. ITC, 118–119.

3. GAJVP, folio 57v.

4. GVP1, 361.

5. VBHAA1, 179–180.

6. Today called 民豐衛衛.

7. Palace of Imperial Prince Yong'en (多羅貝勒永恩府). I'm not entirely sure about their route from the Xuanwu Gate to Yudong Bridge. Guignes's (published) account is the clearest, but he references a bridge being crossed on Xuanwu Dajie before turning right, and that doesn't appear on the *Qianlong Jingcheng quantu* (乾隆京城全圖 [Beijing: 1750] (data set). Japan National Institute of Informatics Digital Silk Road Project, Toyo Bunko, Tokyo, <https://doi.org/10.20676/00000211>, retrieved October 19, 2020). There are a couple inconsistencies in the accounts—and between Guignes's diary and his published account. See the section “A Note on Place Names, Transliterations, Terms, and Sources” near the end of the book.

8. Guignes refers to him by his posthumous Qing-given temple name “Hoay-tsong” (懷宗).

9. In his published book, Guignes says they turn to the right (GVP1, 366.) In his diary, he says they turn left (GAJVP, folio 59v). The street they follow is probably today's Beichang Street (北長街).

10. This is probably the 福佑寺. GVP1, 366.

11. VBHAA1, 180, 181.

12. I translate *kiekkast* as peepshow, but really it's more like “peep-box,” which is no longer idiomatic in modern English. ITC, 118–119.

13. “Strange” (“étrange” is crossed out, replaced by “singulier”) and “hard and cruel” are from GAJVP, folio 59v. “A fierce air” is from GVP1, 366–367.

14. ITC, 118–119.

15. GVP1, 368.

16. ITC, 119.

17. VBHAA1, 181–183.

18. GAJVP, folio 60r–60v.

19. ITC, 119.

20. GVP1, 368.

21. GVP1, 367–369.

22. VBHAA1, 182–183.

23. VBHAA1, 182–183.

24. VBHAA1, 182–183.

25. Memorandum from the Grand Council containing Wang Shiji's report on the arrival of the Dutch in Beijing, Qianlong 59, 12th month, 20th day (January 10, 1795), HLGJ, 377–378. Duyvendak's translation, in DUYVSD, 342–344.

26. Memorandum from the Grand Council containing Wang Shiji's report on the arrival of the Dutch in Beijing, Qianlong 59, 12th month, 20th day (January 10, 1795), HLGJ, 377–378. Duyvendak's translation, in DUYVSD, 342–44.

27. GAJVP, folio 61r; GVP1, 369.

28. GVP1, 369–370.

29. GAJVP, folio 61r.

30. VBHAA1, 180–185.

31. ITC, 119.

32. Guignes is told that in Chinese, it's called “tchen-ho-yu,” and is caught at “Tien-

tsin-cheou [probably 天津], ... a town built on the Pay-ho River, twenty-five leagues southeast of Beijing” (GVP1, 370–371). Titsingh understands differently: that it comes from Liaodong and was caught and frozen two months ago. The anonymous Chinese account notes that “the Chinese call *itschey-po-iu*. It was nearly 8 coves long and weighed around three hundred livres. This fish did not have any scales.” (ACJ, 27).

33. VBHAA1, 185.

34. Qianlong Emperor, “Yong xunhuangyu” 詠鱈鯨魚, in *Yuzhishi* 御製詩, second collection, juan 52 (二集卷五十二), (Siku quanshu 四庫全書 version). Accessible online at [https://zh.wikisource.org/zh-hans/御製詩_\(四庫全書本\)/二集卷052](https://zh.wikisource.org/zh-hans/御製詩_(四庫全書本)/二集卷052), retrieved October 27, 2019.

35. ITC, 120.

36. ITC, 120.

37. GAJVP, folios 61v–62r.

38. VBHAA1, 186–187.

39. VBHAA1, 187.

Chapter Ten

1. GVP1, 370–371; GAJVP, folio 61r–61v.

2. See Evelyn Rawski, *The Last Emperors: A Social History of Qing Imperial Institutions* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 53–55; and Wu Hung, “Emperor’s Masquerade: ‘Costume Portraits’ of Yongzheng and Qianlong,” *Orientalism* (July/August 1995), 25–41.

3. Probably something like the 官廳 depicted as standing in front of the gate, to the left, on the *Qianlong Jingcheng quantu* (乾隆京城全圖) (Beijing: 1750) (a data set). Japan National Institute of Informatics Digital Silk Road Project, Toyo Bunko, Tokyo, <https://doi.org/10.20676/00000211>, retrieved October 19, 2020.

4. GAJVP, folios 62r–63r. Probably 多羅郡王, which is not a name but a title. Various people of this title are taking part in the audience ceremony this day according to the Qing Veritable Records 《清實錄》, 乾隆五十九年十二月乙亥 day, cited in Lin Faqin, “Diguo xieyang,” 172. They’re told the person is a Mongol ambassador, in which case the title would be unlikely to be 多羅郡王.

5. ITC, 120–122.

6. ITC, 120–122.

7. Sim Hūngyǒng (沈興永), “Dongzhi jian xie’en xingshu zhuangguan Shen Xingyong wenjian shijian” 冬至兼謝恩行書狀官沈興永聞見事件, Qianlong 60 Intercalary second month [day unspecified], in *Tongmun hwigo* 同文彙考, Supplement (補編), Shichen biederan yi 使臣別單一, Northeast Asian History Foundation Website, folios 32–33, available online at http://contents.nahf.or.kr/item/item.do?levelId=dh.d_0191_0010_0230, retrieved October 19, 2020. Print version: Pae Usōng 배우성, Ku Pōmjīn 구법진, and the Tongbuga Yōksa Chaedan 동북아역사재단 (東北亞歷史財団), *Kugyōk “Tongmun hwigo” Kanggye saryo* 국역 「同文彙考」 疆界史料 (Seoul: Tongbuga Yōksa Chaedan, 2008).

8. Report by Korean Winter Solstice Emissary Sim Hūngyǒng (冬至書狀官沈興永), *Veritable Records of King Jeongjo* (正祖實錄), vol. 43 十九年 (1795. 閏2月 22日). Accessible online at <https://ko.wikisource.org/wiki/정종문성무열성인장효대왕실록/19년>, retrieved October 19, 2020.

9. GVP1, 374–375.

10. “Eunuchs” is from ACJ, 21. “Feathers” is from GAJVP, folios 64v–65r.

11. The Chinese version of the text uses the character 夷, but the Manchu version uses the more neutral term “people.” Thanks to Cheng-heng Lu for this observation. “Helanguo yiren” 荷蘭國夷人, *Zhigongtu* 職貢圖, juan 1, image no. 28, Bibliothèque nationale de France, département Estampes et photographie, RESERVE PET FOL-B-7, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b55010293t/f1.item.r> = 職貢圖荷蘭, retrieved March 10, 2018.

12. AF, folios 64v–65r.

13. AF, folio 64v.

14. There are various accounts of the questions the emperor asked, and my reconstruction is a composite. The most detailed is ACJ, 20–24; but Guignes's diary, his published work, ITC, and VBHV1 all hold accounts as well, with various slight discrepancies. One thing I'm curious about is that the anonymous Chinese account says Titsingh told the emperor he was 49 years old, but it seems that Titsingh would have been 50. (He was born January 10, 1745.)

15. Sim Hŭngyŏng (沈興永), “Dongzhi jian xie'en xingshu zhuangguan Shen Xingyong wenjian shijian” 冬至兼謝恩行書狀官沈興永聞見事件, Qianlong 60 Intercalary second month [day unspecified], in *Tongmun hwigo* 同文彙考, Supplement (補編), Shichen biederan yi 使臣別單一, Northeast Asian History Foundation Website, folios 32–33, available online at http://contents.nahf.or.kr/item/item.do?levelId=dh.d_0191_0010_0230, retrieved October 19, 2020. Print version: Pae Usŏng 배우성, Ku Pŏmjŏn 구범진, and the Tongbuga Yŏksa Chaedan 동북아역사재단 (東北亞歷史財團), *Kugyŏk “Tongmun hwigo” Kanggye saryo* 국역 「同文彙考」 疆界史料 (Seoul: Tongbuga Yŏksa Chaedan, 2008).

16. ACJ, 20–24

17. VBHAA1, 190–192.

18. VBHAA1, 187–189.

19. The anonymous Chinese diary notes that the emperor isn't bedecked in the splendor of imperial majesty, wearing sumptuous robes of state, but is going out for some recreation (ACJ, 20).

20. ITC, 121–123.

21. The sleighs are known as “rope beds” 繩床, and the emperor is quite fond of them, having devoted poems to them. See, for instance, Qianlong Emperor, “Lari guan bingxi yin yong bingchuang” 臘日觀冰嬉因詠冰床, in *Yuzhishi* 御製詩, fifth collection, juan 92 (五集卷八十二), (Siku quanshu 四庫全書version).

22. ITC, 124.

23. According to the *Qijuzhu*, the emperor went to the Ying Tai 瀛台 to give the banquet (QJZ, vol. 42, pp. 351–352). The *Veritable Records* has a similar entry (though with some intriguing differences) at 《清實錄》, 乾隆五十九年十二月乙亥 day, cited in Lin Faqin, “Diguo xieyang,” 172.

24. VBHAA1, 190–192.

25. “Piependen stem” (GVP1, 378).

26. GVP1, 377–378.

27. ITC, 121–123.

28. Qianlong Emperor, “Yuzhi guan bingxi shi” 御製觀冰嬉詩, in *Guochao gongshi xubian* 國朝宮史續編, Book 22, Juan 67. On this and other poems by Qianlong about the Ice Games, see Han Dan 韓丹, “Qianlong ‘Bingxi fu’ ji qita bing shi jiedu” 乾隆《冰嬉賦》及其它冰詩解讀, *Ha'erbin tiyu xueyuan xuebao* 哈爾濱體育學院學報 vol. 17 (fourth issue of 1999 volume), 9–18; and Han Dan 韓丹, “Qianlong ‘Bingxi fu’ ji qita bing shi jiedu xu” 乾隆《冰嬉賦》及其它冰詩解讀 (續), *Ha'erbin tiyu xueyuan xuebao* 哈爾濱體育學院學報 vol. 18 (third issue of 2000 volume), 10–15.

29. Qianlong Emperor, “Lari guan bingxi.”

30. Contextual information about the Ice Games comes from other sources, most notably Wu Zhenyu 吳振棫, *Yangjizhai conglu* 養吉齋叢錄 (Taipei: Wenhai Press, 1968 [民國年 57]), juan 14, folios 5–6.

31. Intriguingly, no mention of shots fired at this point is made by Europeans in their accounts, although Guignes mentions that three shots are fired a bit earlier, to announce the arrival of the emperor on the ice after his breakfast. GVP1, 380.

32. VBHAA1, 194–195.

33. 資八旗歲歲之計, Commentary on Qianlong Emperor, “Lari guan bingxi,” in *Yu zhi shi wu ji* 御製詩五集, juan 92, in *Si ku quan shu* 四庫全書. Accessible online at [https://zh.wikisource.org/zh-hans/御製詩_\(四庫全書本\)/五集卷_092](https://zh.wikisource.org/zh-hans/御製詩_(四庫全書本)/五集卷_092), retrieved October 19, 2020.

34. GAJVP, folio 67v.
35. Wu Zhenyu, Yangjizhai conglu, folios 5–6.
36. VBHAA1, 194–195.
37. ITC, 124.
38. GAJVP, folios 68v–69r.
39. ITC, 124.
40. VBHAA1, 196–199.
41. VBHAA1, 196–197.
42. ITC, 124–125.
43. GAJVP, folios 68v–69r.

44. The information that he complemented them on the ceremonies is found in the somewhat suspect anonymous Chinese account. It's also intriguing that this account states that another minister, "whose name was Fou tchong tang, found himself at the place of the first minister, and in the conversation that took place, the aforementioned ministers made new compliments to the ambassador, saying that he had carried out all of the ceremonies very well, en ajoutant d'autres sur ses dignités civiles, capacité militaire, etc. The ambassador, for his part, excused himself for his lack of experience with such ceremonies, and thanked the ministers and complimented them on their politeness, good treatment, attentions, etc., and then they left." ACJ, 23–24.

45. GVP1, 382–383.
46. VBHAA1, 197–198.
47. VBHAA1, 197–198.
48. GVP1, 383.
49. VBHAA1, 197–198.
50. GAJVP, folio 69v.
51. ITC, 125.

Chapter Eleven

1. Titsingh says sent by the emperor; Van Braam says by the "prime minister."
2. VBHAA1, 203–204.
3. VBHAA1, 201–203.
4. ITC, 126–128; GVP1, 389.
5. ITC, 128.
6. GVP1, 388.
7. ITC, 127.
8. ITC, 125.
9. ITC, 125. See also VBHAA1, 199–200.
10. ITC, 126; GVP1, 387.
11. ITC, 126.
12. ACJ, 24.
13. ITC, 127.
14. ITC, 127.
15. VBHAA1, 208–209.
16. VBHAA1, 210–212.
17. ITC, 126.
18. GVP1, 389.
19. VBHAA1, 206–207.

20. Pak Chong-ak 박종악 (朴宗岳), *Sugi: Chǒngjo ŭi murǔm e tap hanŭn Pak Chong-ak ŭi sŏsin* 수기 隨記 : 정조의 물음에 답하는 박종악의 서신, translated and edited by Sin Ik-ch'ŏl 신익철 (Kyōnggi-do Sōngnam-si: Han'gukhak Chungang Yŏn'guwŏn Ch'ulp'anbu, 2016), Chinese p. 337, Korean translation on p. 244.

21. Gari Ledyard, "Korean Travelers in China over Four Hundred Years, 1488–1887,"

Occasional Papers on Korea 2 (1974): 1–42, p. 20.

22. Pak, *Sugi*, 337 (Korean translation on p. 244).

23. VBHAA1, 206–207.

24. ITC, 128.

25. ITC, 128; GAJVP, folios 72v–73r.

26. ITC, 128.

27. Letter from J. A. van Braam in Canton to his father J. P. van Braam in Zwolle, June 15, 1796, in JAVB, vol. 2, pp. 16–27, quote on p. 17.

28. Pak, *Sugi*, 337 (Korean translation on p. 244).

29. Translation by Mary Bohn from the Korean translation in Pak, *Sugi*, 244 (Chinese version on p. 337).

30. Translation by Mary Bohn from the Korean translation in Pak, *Sugi*, 244 (Chinese on p. 337).

31. ITC, 128.

32. VBHAA1, 212–214.

33. GAJVP, folio 73v; GVP1, 390.

34. VBHAA1, 212–213.

35. The description “old” and “gray-bearded” comes from an earlier encounter that Van Braam had with the gentleman. See DUYVLE, 332, note 1.

36. GVP1, 389–390.

37. VBHAA1, 213.

38. GAJVP, folios 73v–74r.

39. “Confidant” is from GVP1, 391; “factotum” is from GAJVP, folio 74r. It’s not clear who precisely this is, although there’s good reason to believe that he may be the Manchu official Yue Qian 岳謙.

40. “Very friendly” is from GAJVP, folio 74r; “pleasant countenance” is from ITC, 129.

41. GAJVP, folio 74v.

42. GVP1, 392.

43. ITC, 129.

44. ITC, 129.

45. VBHAA1, 216–217.

46. I believe, based on his subsequent description, that he enters the Meridian Gate Square through the 端門.

47. VBHAA1, 219.

48. ITC, 130.

49. HLGJ, 378.

50. This may be the Xihe Gate 熙和門, but it’s not easy to understand Van Braam’s directions at times, and he doesn’t provide names. He says merely that after passing through the south gate of the imperial palace (likely the Wu Gate 午門), he is then carried westward through a gate, with stairs leading up through the gate, after which he finds himself in the plaza on the interior side of the Western (Xihua) Gate. He doesn’t describe the waterway or anything else about the plaza in front of the 太和門. VBHAA1, 220.

51. Van Braam doesn’t describe the bridge, but it’s pretty clear that this must be the one he crossed at this point.

52. This is most likely the Qianqing Gate 乾清門, inferring from VBHAA1, 222.

53. Entering and exiting, GAJVP, folio 76v. Menial duties, VBHAA1, 222.

54. VBHAA1, 222–223.

55. Pak, *Sugi*, 243 (Mary Bohn’s translation of the Korean version).

56. Pak, *Sugi*, 243 (Mary Bohn’s translation of the Korean version). The Korean *Veritable Records* contain similar language, saying that the seventeenth son is “frivolous and has no authority of bearing.” Report by Korean Winter Solstice Emissary Sim Hūngyōng (冬至書狀官沈興永), *Veritable Records of King Jeongjo* (正祖實錄), vol. 43 十九年 (1795) 閏2月 22日. Accessible online at <https://ko.wikisource.org/wiki/정종문성무열성인장효대>

왕실록/19년, retrieved October 19, 2020.

57. Report by Korean Winter Solstice Emissary Sim Hŭngyŏng (冬至書狀官沈興永), *Veritable Records of King Jeongjo* (正祖實錄), vol. 43十九年 (1795. 閏2月 22日). Accessible online at <https://ko.wikisource.org/wiki/정종문성무열성인장효대왕실록/19년>, retrieved October 19, 2020.

58. Van Braam doesn't name the palace, but it's mentioned as the venue of the theater event in HLGJ, 378.

59. The terms “narrow slots” and “paper windows” are from GAJVP, folio 75v.

60. Hong Yangho 洪良浩 (홍양호), *Erxi ji* 耳溪集, juan 7, in Im Ki-jung 林基中, ed., *Yanxinglu quanji* (Yŏnhaengnok chŏnjip) 燕行錄 全集, vol. 41 (Seoul: Tongguk Taehakkyo Ch'ulp'anbu, 2001).

61. Hong Yangho, *Erxi ji*, juan 7. To make the many cultural references accessible to readers, I have used more generic language to provide the sense. For instance, “golden palaces reach the high heavens” is 金闕九重抗碧霄, and “present precious things” is 獻璧璫.

62. Report by Korean Winter Solstice Emissary Sim Hŭngyŏng (冬至書狀官沈興永), *Veritable Records of King Jeongjo* (正祖實錄), vol. 43十九年 (1795. 閏2月 22日). Accessible online at <https://ko.wikisource.org/wiki/정종문성무열성인장효대왕실록/19년>, retrieved October 19, 2020. The original specifies that Burma is also one of the farthest countries of the world: 凡諸國之中, 緬甸、西洋、荷蘭, 以程道最遠.

63. VBHAA1, 224.

64. VBHAA1, 229.

65. VBHAA1, 228.

66. Pak Saho, 1828, cited in Ledyard, “Korean Travelers,” 16.

67. GVP1, 395. Intriguingly, this negative judgment—like so many negative judgments—doesn't appear in his journal, GAJVP, but only shows up later in this published account (GVP1), which appears more than a decade later.

68. VBHAA1, 230.

Chapter Twelve

1. ITC, 130.

2. GAJVP, folio 77r.

3. VBHM1, p. 115.

4. VBHM1, p. 116.

5. ITC, 131–132.

6. VBHAA1, 237.

7. ITC, 131.

8. VBHAA1, 237.

9. VBHM1, p. 115.

10. On Qianlong's sartorial innovations, see Yuan Hongqi 苑洪琪, “Qianlong shiqi de gongting jiejing huodong” 乾隆時期的宮廷節慶活動, *Gugong bowuguan kan* 故宮博物院院刊, 1991, vol. 3: 81–87, p. 82.

11. VBHAA1, 238.

12. This is likely part of the *yanglie* dance (楊烈舞).

13. VBHAA1, 241–242.

14. ITC, 131–132.

15. See Siu-Wah Yu, “The Meaning and Cultural Functions of Non-Chinese Musics in the Eighteenth-Century Manchu Court,” PhD dissertation, Department of Music, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, 1996, esp. pp. 42–144. On Qing banquets, a good place to start is Michael Chang, “Of Feasts and Feudatories: The Politics of Commensal Consumption at the Early Kangxi Court,” in Elif Akcetin and Suraiya Faroqhi, eds., *Living the Good Life: Consumption in the Qing and Ottoman Empires of the Eighteenth Century* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 307–329.

16. Siu-Wah Yu, "The Meaning," esp. pp. 80–82.
17. Siu-Wah Yu, "The Meaning," pp. 129–134.
18. ITC, 131–132.
19. Carol Stepanchuk and Charles Choy Wong, *Mooncakes and Hungry Ghosts: Festivals of China* (San Francisco: China Books & Periodicals, 1991), 24.
20. ITC, 131–132.
21. The banquet in fact probably cost much less. See Rawski, *The Last Emperors*, 47–48.
22. VBHAA1, 246–247.
23. GVP1, 396.
24. ITC, 132.
25. ITC, 132; VBHAA1, 148.
26. ITC, 132; VBHAA1, 148.
27. Qianlong Emperor, "Tianjuan chengduhou xinde Qianlong jiliuxun" 天眷誠獨厚幸得乾隆紀六旬, QLYZS, fifth collection, juan 93 (五集卷93).
28. Other areas near Beijing also saw large amounts of rain. See Zhang De'er 張德二, ed., *Zhongguo sanqianian qixiang jilu zongji* 中國三千年氣象紀錄總集 5 vols. (Nanjing: Jiangsu jiaoyu 江蘇教育 press, 2013), vol. 3, 2777.
29. "Tianjuan chengduhou xinde Qianlong jiliuxun" 天眷誠獨厚幸得乾隆紀六旬, QLYZS, fifth collection, juan 93 (五集卷93).
30. There is some scholarly disagreement on the Qianlong's abdication and its meaning. Was it a wise act, to preserve the realm because the emperor was aware of his own infirmities? Li Zhengzhong 李正中, "Qianlong rangwei" 乾隆讓位, *Qilu xuekan* 齊魯學刊, 1983(02): 66; cf. Feng Zuozhe 馮佐哲, "'Qianlong rangwei' xiaoyi" 《乾隆讓位》小议, *Qilu xuekan* 齊魯學刊, 1983(06): 60. Or did the emperor vainly seek to hold onto power as long as possible? Bai Xinliang 白新良, "Qianlong chuanwei he taishanghuang shenghuo" 乾隆傳位和太上皇生活, *Zijincheng* 紫禁城, 1989(01): 3–5.
31. Qianlong Emperor, "Xinyuan fuchu liuxunsui" 心願符初六旬歲, QLYZS, fifth collection, juan 93 (五集卷93). The collection of the Palace Museum in Beijing has a Qianlong seal inscribed with the same phrase (心願符初). <https://www.dpm.org.cn/collection/seal/233621.html?hl=心願符初>, retrieved October 19, 2020. Thanks to Hu Yiqing for finding this, and for her help checking my translations.
32. Michael Chang, "A Court on Horseback: Constructing Manchu Ethno-Dynastic Rule in China, 1751–1784," PhD dissertation, University of California, San Diego, 2001, 421.
33. See Michael Chang's excellent account in Chang, "Court on Horseback," 416–422; and also Bai, "Qianlong chuanwei," 3. The incident is recounted in the Qing Qianlong Veritable Records, Qianlong 43rd year, ninth month, yiwei day (October 8, 1778) and Qianlong 43, ninth month, dingwei day (November 9, 1778).
34. Yu Dahua 喻大華, "Qianlong zhizheng 60 nian wunai shanrang huangwei" 乾隆執政60年無奈禪讓皇位, *Baokan huicui* 報刊薈萃, 2011(06): 46–47, 46. It's not clear what sources Yu Dahua is relying on in his account.
35. Qing Veritable Records, Qianlong period, Qianlong 60, first month, Gengyin (庚寅) Day.
36. It is carried out on the first xin 辛 day of the first month of the new year. This year, it's carried out on the 辛卯 day, or eighth day (January 28, 1795).
37. Bai, "Qianlong chuanwei," 3–4.
38. ACJ, 25, specifies that this greeting occurs at the "ou men." This is Titsingh's first time in this part of the Forbidden City, so to him it just seems that he is taken "deep inside the palace" (ITC, 133).
39. ITC, 133.
40. ITC, 133.
41. ITC, 133.
42. VBHAA1, 259.

43. John Webb, *The Antiquity of China: Or an Historical Essay Endeavouring a Probability that the Language of the Empire of China is the Primitive Language Spoken through the Whole World before the Confusion of Babel* (London: Obadiah Blagrave, 1678).

44. ITC, 133.

45. VBHAA1, 261–262.

46. VBHAA1, 261–262.

47. GVP1, 399.

48. ACJ, 25.

49. VBHAA1, 263.

50. VBHAA1, 263.

51. For a list of the main rituals, see the wonderful dissertation by Ben Wu, “Ritual Music in the Court and Rulership of the Qing Dynasty (1644–1911),” PhD dissertation, University of Pittsburgh, 1998, pp. 266–271.

Chapter Thirteen

1. Probably the one marked 紫光門 on the *Qianlong Jingcheng quantu*.

2. VBHAA1, 269–270.

3. See the painting by Qing court painter Yao Wenhan 姚文瀚, “Ziguangge ciyan tujian” 紫光閣賜宴圖卷, color ink on silk scroll, 1762 (Qianlong 26th year) National Palace Museum, Beijing. Available online at <https://t.shuge.org/zggcyt>, retrieved October 19, 2020. The painting commemorates the banquet given to honor military heroes by the Qianlong emperor in the first month of Qianlong’s twenty-sixth year, or 1762.

4. Van Braam says they enter from the eastern side and are seated on the terrace. VBHAA1, 271–272.

5. VBHM1, p. 132; VBHAA1, 270–271.

6. The main piece is “In Commemoration of the Achievement of the Ten Perfect Fortunate Victories in the Purple Ray Pavilion,” “Ziguangge ji wuchenggong xingde shiquan” 紫光閣紀武功幸得十全, although I’m also citing from “慚愧老人獲十全.” Both are in QLYZS, fifth collection, juan 93 (五集卷093), [https://zh.wikisource.org/wiki/御製詩_\(四庫全書本\)/五集卷093](https://zh.wikisource.org/wiki/御製詩_(四庫全書本)/五集卷093), retrieved October 19, 2020.

7. VBHAA1, 271–272.

8. ITC, 135.

9. Van Braam says \$2,000; IT says 1,000 taels.

10. GVP1, 401.

11. I’m not entirely sure the poem commemorates today’s event, but it does seem to have been written during the first month of Qianlong 60. Qianlong, “Yong tanyu ruyi” 詠檀玉如意, QLYZS, fifth collection, juan 93 (五集卷093), [https://zh.wikisource.org/wiki/御製詩_\(四庫全書本\)/五集卷093](https://zh.wikisource.org/wiki/御製詩_(四庫全書本)/五集卷093), retrieved October 19, 2020.

12. Since the 辛亥, or 48th, year, about five years before this. Qianlong Emperor, “Xinzheng Chonghuagong chayan tingcheng ji neiting Hanlin yong Hongfan jiu-wu fu zhi wuyue kaozhongming lianju fu cheng er lü” 新正重華宮茶宴廷臣及內廷翰林用洪範九五福之五日考終命聯句復成二律, QLYZS, fifth collection, juan 93 (五集卷093), [https://zh.wikisource.org/wiki/御製詩_\(四庫全書本\)/五集卷093](https://zh.wikisource.org/wiki/御製詩_(四庫全書本)/五集卷093), retrieved October 19, 2020.

13. Qianlong Emperor, “Xinzheng Chonghua gong.”

14. Qianlong Emperor, “Xinzheng Chonghua gong.”

15. Qianlong Emperor, commentary on “Tianjuan Meng xinjiu pingfan dian shuxu liu xun qinghe Helan tong” 天眷新舊屏藩典屬敘六旬慶賀荷蘭同QLYZS, fifth collection, juan 93 (五集卷093), [https://zh.wikisource.org/wiki/御製詩_\(四庫全書本\)/五集卷093](https://zh.wikisource.org/wiki/御製詩_(四庫全書本)/五集卷093), retrieved October 19, 2020.

16. On the Koreans being the only foreigners allowed to visit these areas, see I Tökmü李德懋, 이덕무, *Ruyanjī* 入燕記, in *Yōnhaengnok chōnjip* 燕行錄 全集, 100 volumes (Seoul: Tongguk Taehakkyo Ch’ulp’anbu, 2001), vol. 57, 187–344, pp. 307–308. Also available

online at <https://wenku.baidu.com/view/78de78eb998fcc22bcd10df8.html>, retrieved October 19, 2020.

17. Sim Hŭngyŏng (沈興永), “Dongzhi jian xie’en xingshu zhuangguan Shen Xingyong wenjian shijian” 冬至兼謝恩行書狀官沈興永聞見事件, Qianlong 60 Intercalary second month [day unspecified], in *Tongmun hwigo* 同文彙考, Supplement (補編), Shichen biederan yi 使臣別單一, Northeast Asian History Foundation Website, folios 32–33 (quote on folio 33), available online at http://contents.nahf.or.kr/item/item.do?levelId=dh.d.0191_0010_0230, retrieved October 19, 2020. Print version: Pae Usŏng 배우성, Ku Pŏmjŏn 구법진, and the Tongbuga Yŏksa Chaedan 동북아역사재단 (東北亞歷史財團), *Kugyŏk “Tongmun hwigo” Kanggye saryo* 국역 「同文彙考」 疆界史料 (Seoul: Tongbuga Yŏksa Chaedan, 2008).

18. “Fat” (zwaarlijfig) is from VBHM1, p. 133. Quote from VBHAA1, 274–275.

19. VBHAA1, 275–276.

20. VBHM1, p. 133.

21. VBHAA1, 275–276.

22. VBHM1, p. 133, states “den laatsten kijser uit den Chineese stam.”

23. On the Koreans’ relationship with the Qing, based on Korean travel accounts, see Ge Zhaoguang 葛兆光, *Xiangxiang Yiyu: Du Lichao Chaoxian hanwen yanxing wenxian zhali* 想象異域——讀李朝朝鮮漢文燕行文獻札記 (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 2014).

24. ITC, 136.

25. ITC, 136.

26. ITC, 136.

27. ITC, 136–137.

28. I’m combining the wording in the Dutch manuscript (VBHM1, p. 136) with that from the published English-language version, in VBHAA1, 282–283.

29. Again, this is a combined quote, drawing from VBHM1, p. 136; and from VBHAA1, 283–284.

30. These drawings are now held in the Bibliothèque Nationale of France, département Estampes et photographie, PET FOL-OE-18, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b10501744g>, retrieved October 19, 2020. For more on these, see Paul Pelliot, “Les Conquêtes de l’Empereur de la Chine,” T’oung Pao, second series, vol. 20, no. 3/4 (August 1920–August 1921): 183–275, especially pp. 233ff.

31. ITC, 134.

32. ITC, 134.

33. ITC, 134.

Chapter Fourteen

1. VBHAA1, 284.

2. I presume that in this case he had a heated palanquin—that is the usual practice. See Wong, *A Paradise Lost: The Imperial Garden Yuanming Yuan* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2000), p. 119.

3. GAJVP, folios 80v–81r; GVP1, 402–404.

4. Van Braam calls it the Tsay-on Gate (in Cantonese it would be sai ngon). VBHAA1, 285.

5. GAJVP, folio 83r.

6. One can follow along this roadway on sections V-6: 9, 10, and 11 of the *Qianlong Jingcheng quantu* (乾隆京城全圖) (Beijing: 1750) [data set]. Japan National Institute of Informatics Digital Silk Road Project, Toyo Bunko, Tokyo, <https://doi.org/10.20676/00000211>, retrieved October 19, 2020, The triumphal arches might include the 四牌樓 at V-6:9. They also crossed two bridges with balustrades of white marble, which I suspect are the 斷魂橋, which is near the Xi’an Gate, and the 馬市橋 (at V-6: 10).

7. GVP1, 404–405.

8. VBHAA1, 286–287.
9. Nieuhof, *Embassy*, 83.
10. Pamela Crossley, *Orphan Warriors: Three Manchu Generations and the End of the Qing World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), p. 92.
11. Titsingh says Tibet: ITC, 138; Van Braam says they were presents from a “great Mandarin residing on the Western frontiers: VBHAA1, 286.
12. I believe it was the Xizhi Gate 西直門 because of the description in VBHAA1, 285–286, which says that as soon as they exit the Xi’an Gate of the imperial gardens, they turn northward and follow a broad street for fifteen minutes, after which they then turn and drive westward for another fifteen minutes before exiting the city at the gate of Tsai-chec. In Cantonese, 西直門 is Sai zik mun, which is close to “Tsai-chec.”
13. VBHAA1, 286.
14. ITC, 138.
15. They arrive at their lodging at 2:40, about two hours after leaving. They agree it’s some distance away from Yuanmingyuan, six or seven li. It is thirty li from Beijing, according to Guignes. Titsingh calls the town/village “Hoeylang.” (“At half past two we arrived in the village of Hoeylang.”) Guignes calls it “Louau-hou-tong.” Van Braam calls it Uoitime, saying that it’s ten li from Yuanmingyuan.
16. A look at Haidian’s street names doesn’t seem to provide any insight. Xu Zheng 徐征 and Feng Daihong 馮黛虹, *Haidian lao jiexiang hutong xunzong* 海淀老街巷胡同尋蹤 (Beijing: Xueyuan chubanshe 學苑出版社, 2009).
17. GVP1, 402–404.
18. ITC, 137–138.
19. ITC, 137–138.
20. VBHAA1, 288.
21. GVP1, 405.
22. VBHAA2, 1–2.
23. Qianlong emperor, colophons on painting by Tang Dai, “Shan gao shui chang” 山高水長, paint and calligraphy on silk, 1744, part of Yuanmingyuan sishiwu jing 圓明園四十景, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris, Département Estampes et Photographie, RESERVE FT 6-B-9, available online at <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b550083280>, retrieved October 19, 2020.
24. Qianlong emperor, colophons on painting by Tang Dai, “Shan gao.”
25. Qianlong emperor, colophons on painting by Tang Dai, “Shan gao.”
26. ITC, 138–139.
27. VBHAA2, 2–4.
28. VBHM1, p. 139.
29. ITC, 138–139.
30. “Forbidden ground” is from Wong, *Paradise Lost*, p. 30. Wong notes that Titsingh and Van Braam being allowed to visit the area was “most extraordinary” (p. 89).
31. VBHAA2, 4–22.
32. ITC, 140.
33. VBHM1, p. 139.
34. ITC, 140.
35. This is my translation, based on translations by others, but of course I interpret the story in my own way, as focusing on epistemology, which affects the translation. In fact, there are many different translations, and even more different interpretations, some of which argue that this exchange isn’t about epistemology at all. A great place to start is Roger T. Ames and Nakajima Takahiro, eds., *Zhuangzi and the Happy Fish* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2015), which contains articles by fourteen different scholars, who each advance varying interpretations.
36. Qianlong emperor, poem on Tang Dai 唐岱 and Shen Yuan 沈源, “Tantan dangdang” 坦坦瀟瀟, paint and calligraphy on silk, 1744, part of Yuanmingyuan sishiwu jing 圓明園四十景, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris, Département Estampes et Photographie,

RESERVE FT 6-B-9, available online at <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b55008323r>, retrieved October 19, 2020. This allusive poem is difficult to translate.

37. Qianlong emperor, colophon on Tang Dai 唐岱 and Shen Yuan 沈源, “Tantan dangdang” 坦坦蕩蕩, paint and calligraphy on silk, 1744, part of Yuanmingyuan sishiwu jing 圓明園四十景, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris, Département Estampes et Photographie, RESERVE FT 6-B-9, available online at <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b55008323r>, retrieved October 19, 2020.

38. VBHAA2, 5. It’s difficult to know where exactly they are, because the envoys’ descriptions are confused, but clearly it’s a major imperial residence.

39. ITC, 140; VBHAA2, 7–8.

40. VBHAA2, 4–22.

41. VBHM1, 141. Cf. VBHAA2, 4–22.

42. Again, it’s hard to tell where exactly they are, but 九州清晏 seems the most likely place.

43. ITC, 140.

44. VBHAA2, 9.

45. Possibly the 九孔橋, although Van Braam counts seventeen arches.

46. VBHAA2, 10–11.

47. ITC, 140.

48. See Lilian M. Li, “The Garden of Perfect Brightness 1: The Yuanmingyuan as Imperial Paradise,” MIT Visualizing Cultures Project, at https://ocw.mit.edu/ans7870/21f/21f.027/garden_perfect_brightness/ymy1_essay02.html, retrieved October 19, 2020.

49. Jean Denis Attiret (王致誠), “Lettre du frère Attiret de la Compagnie de Jesus, peintre au service de l’empereur de la Chine à M. d’Assaut, à Pékin, le 1 Novembre 1743,” in *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses, écrites des missions étrangères*, vol. 27 (Paris: Frères Guerin, 1749), pp. 1–61. For more on Attiret, see Léo Keller, “‘Un pinceau utile pour le bien de la religion’: Jean Denis Attiret (1702–1768), dit Wang Zhicheng, peintre jésuite à la cour de Chine,” in Edith Flamarion, ed., *La chair et le verbe: les jésuites de France au XVIII^e siècle et l’image* (Paris: Presses Sorbonne Nouvelle, 2008), 47–74.

50. His negative opinion of the rest of China may have to do with the circumstances of his travels. He complains that on the voyage from Macau to Beijing, he was shut up on boats and in palanquins, barely able to look through the window, not to mention wander abroad, calling the palanquin a “cage.” Attiret, “Lettre du frère,” 1–6.

51. F. (Jean Denis) Attiret, *A Particular Account of the Emperor of China’s Gardens near Pekin*, translated from the French by Sir Harry Beaumont (London: R. Dodsley, 1752), p. 5.

52. Attiret, “Lettre du frère,” 6–7.

53. Joseph-Marie Amiot, “Extrait d’une lettre du 1^{er} mars 1769, de Péking, contenant l’éloge du frère Attiret et le précis d l’état de la peinture chez les Chinois,” *Chine ancienne*, <https://www.chineancienne.fr/17e-18e-s/amiot-eloge-du-frere-attiret/>, retrieved October 19, 2020.

54. Hong Taeyong 홍대용 洪大容, *Yanji* (燕記) (1777), cited in Qi Qingfu (祁庆富) and Jin Chengnan (金成南), “Qingdai Chaoxian shichen yu Yuanmingyuan” 清代朝鮮使臣與圓明園, *Qingshi yanjiu* 清史研究 vol. 2005, no. 3 (August 2005): 89–97, p. 89.

55. The years from 1782 through the 1799 were the period of warmest relations between the Qing dynasty and the Koreans. See Qi and Jin, “Qingdai Chaoxian,” 90–91.

56. Absence of evidence is not, of course, evidence of absence, but the fairly comprehensive account, Qi and Jin, “Qingdai Chaoxian,” suggests that Koreans weren’t given tours of these most intimate areas.

57. VBHAA2, 12.

58. ITC, 140.

59. ITC, 140.

60. See Wong, *Paradise Lost*, 126–127.

61. ITC, 140.
62. VBHAA2, 15–16.
63. VBHAA2, 18.
64. VBHAA2, 23. Titsingh's account has a quite similar passage, but with a notable difference: "This is the reason that the real value of European artisanal pieces remains so unknown, or is *pretended to be so unknown*: to leave no clues in case of an investigation." ITC, 140–141, my italics.
65. VBHAA2, 20–21.
66. VBHAA2, 21–22.
67. GAJVP, folio 84r.
68. VBHAA2, 22–23.
69. VBHAA2, 26–27.

Chapter Fifteen

1. GAJVP, folio 84v.
2. GVP1, 408.
3. According to the Qianlong court diary, this is where the fireworks display takes place on this day. QJZ, vol. 42, entry for QL 60, first month, thirteenth day.
4. GVP1, 408.
5. Based on transliterations, I believe that the translators tell the Europeans it's called Gaoliyao 高麗藥, or "Korean Medicine."
6. GAJVP, folio 86r.
7. GVP1, 408.
8. GAJVP, folio 86v.
9. GAJVP, folio 86v.
10. Yu Ōnho 俞彦鎬 유언호, *Yanxinglu* 燕行錄, (1788), cited in Qi and Jin, "Qingdai Chaoxian," 89–97.
11. VBHAA2, 27–28.
12. Qi and Jin, "Qingdai Chaoxian," 93.
13. GVP1, 413–414.
14. GAJVP, folios 87v–88r.
15. Qi and Jin, "Qingdai Chaoxian," 93.
16. ITC, 142–144.
17. VBHAA2, 28.
18. Kim Chôngchung 金正中 김정중, *Yanxinglu* (*Yanxing riji*) 燕行錄 (燕行日記), 2 vols (上 and 下), cited in Qi and Jin, "Qingdai Chaoxian," 93.
19. GVP1, 416.
20. GVP1, 416.
21. GVP1, 416.
22. GAJVP, folio 89r.
23. "Good to amuse children" is from GAJVP, folio 89r–89v; "Bagatelles" is from GVP1, 416.
24. VBHAA2, ends at 29.
25. ITC, 142–144. The gentlemen wonder why the fireworks took place in the daytime and early evening. Guignes suspects it's because the emperor needs to get up early the next morning (GAJVP, folio 89r). Van Braam speculates that "the old Monarch is so much afraid of fire, that he will never permit any [fireworks] to be displayed during the night. Even at these [fireworks] two little European fire-engines were ready, as well as a great number of tubs full of water, and pails, to extinguish the burning paper of the crackers, as soon as their explosion should be at end." VBHAA2, 29.
26. GVP1, 416–417.
27. ITC, 143.

28. February 3, 1795.
29. Wong, *Paradise Lost*, 27.
30. ITC, 144.
31. GVP1, 418–419.
32. VBHAA2, 38 or so.
33. Guignes and the others say it represents the moon.
34. ITC, 146.
35. VBHAA2, ends at 45.
36. Qi and Jin, “Qingdai Chaoxian,” 96–97.
37. GAJVP, folio 94v.
38. ITC, 146.
39. ITC, 146–147.
40. ITC, 146–147.
41. ITC, 147.
42. VBHAA2, 47–48.
43. GVP1, 425–426.
44. VBHAA2, 47–48.
45. GVP1, 427.
46. In his boot is from ITC, 147.
47. VBHAA2, 50–52.
48. This encounter with the Koreans prompts Titsingh to muse that he’s been lied to, having been told that the Koreans had left Yuanmingyuan as well as the Dutch: “It appeared, then, that their departure did not actually take place as it had been told to us.” ITC, 148.
49. ITC, 148.
50. ITC, 148.
51. VBHAA2, 54.
52. ITC, 148.
53. ITC, 148.
54. DUYVSD, 352–353.
55. The name 坐石臨流 isn’t mentioned in European sources, but Qianlong’s court diary makes clear that this is where the event was held: QJZ, vol. 42, Qianlong 60, first month, nineteenth day, pp. 15–16.
56. “Pathetic,” ITC, 149.
57. ITC, 148–149.
58. Qianlong emperor, “Zi guang ge ji wu cheng gong xing de shi quan” 紫光閣紀武功成率得十全, QLYZS, fifth collection, juan 93 (五集卷093), [https://zh.wikisource.org/wiki/御製詩_\(四庫全書本\)/五集卷093](https://zh.wikisource.org/wiki/御製詩_(四庫全書本)/五集卷093), retrieved February 24, 2017. There’s no direct evidence that this composition, which was written for the occasion of the Purple Ray Pavilion Banquet, is the one sung today, but it seems to be the best candidate of the poems in the QLYZS. See also DUYVSD, 346, note 1.
59. Hong Yangho 洪良浩 홍양호, cited in Qi and Jin, “Qingdai Chaoxian,” 91. This poem is, I believe, from the first time Hong Yang-ho went to Beijing, in 1783, and not the second time (1794–1795). Qi and Jin say his visit was in 1783, for the winter festivals. Chen Shangsheng says it was 1782, but of course, to make it to Beijing in time, the Koreans would have had to leave in 1782, toward the end of the solar year. Chen Shangsheng 陳尚勝, “Ming-Qing shidai de Chaoxian shijie yu Zhongguo jiwen” 明清時代的朝鮮使節與中國記聞, *Haijiao shi yanjiu* 海交史研究, 2001 vol., no. 2, 38–55, p. 48.
60. DUYVSD, 346–347.
61. GVP1, 427.

1. ITC, 149.
2. QJZ, vol. 42, entry for QL 60, first month, twenty-first day (February 8, 1795), 18.
3. Hevia, *Cherishing*, p. 111; Peyrefitte, *Immobile*, p. 201.
4. Guignes's Chinese is good enough to understand the pronunciation of the gate, "wu," but he misinterprets its meaning. "Wu," pronounced with the third tone, can mean "five." He writes, "The Chinese call this place wu-men, which means 'five gates.' " In fact, the "Wu" in the gate's name means "meridian," because this gate straddles the sacred axis of the Forbidden City. GAJVP, folio 97r.
5. ITC, 149–150.
6. This individual is the so-called "Tartar escort," whom I believe to be Ming Shan.
7. GAJVP, folio 96r–96v.
8. GVP1, 431.
9. GAJVP, folio 97v.
10. GAJVP, folios 97v–98r.
11. ITC, 149–150.
12. VBHAA2, 59–60. Titsingh mentions this bribe-sale in a letter later, saying that he kept the details out of his official diary on purpose, to prevent foreign nations from knowing about it. He also names the amount exchanged: 300 taels. Letter from IT in Canton to Batavia, January 8, 1796, OIC 196: unfoliated.
13. Letter from J. A. van Braam in Canton to his father J. P. van Braam in Zwolle, June 15, 1796, in JAVB, vol. 2, pp. 16–27, 18.
14. This happens on February 12.
15. GVP1, 433.
16. VBHAA2, 62–64.
17. GVP1, 435.
18. ITC, 151.
19. ITC, 125.
20. VBHAA1, 204–205.
21. ITC, 137. And GAJVP, folio 80r–80v.
22. GVP1, 435–436; VBHAA2, 70.
23. As it turns out, the mandarins won't be able to fix the clock, so it will, after all, be sent back to Canton. GVP1, 434; GVP2, 1; and ITC, 152.
24. "These people," he writes, "are unaware, or, rather, know nothing." GVP1, 435–436.
25. GAJVP, folio 100r.
26. Memorandum from the Grand Council, twenty-third day of the twelfth moon (January 13, 1795), translation based on that of DUYVSD, 345.
27. ITC, 151.
28. VBHAA2, 64.
29. GVP1, 437–449.
30. GVP1, 437–449.
31. GVP1, 439. He goes on to say, "But in China they assess gifts based not on their intrinsic value but according to the quality of the person who gives them. So the emperor, believing himself to be the premier person in the world, thinks that his presents must be priceless."
32. ITC, 151–152.
33. VBHAA2, 67.
34. VBHAA2, 66–67.
35. ITC, 152.
36. GAJVP, folio 101r.
37. GVP2, 2–4.

Chapter Seventeen

1. Letter from Isaac Titsingh in Yingtak to Sebastiaan Cornelis Nederburgh in Batavia, November 24, 1794, in ITVT, 162. Van Braam also noted the rushed and unpleasant trip. Canton Dagregister, December 1, 1793–January 12, 1795, OIC 195: 351–485, 394–400, p. 397.

2. I used “sail away” for “sail out of the Tiger’s Mouth.” VBH in Canton Dagregister, December 1, 1793–January 12, 1795, OIC 195: 351–485, 394–400, p. 397.

3. Their voyage back will end up lasting eighty-three days. Macartney’s trip back to Canton lasted seventy-four days, an average of twenty-three miles per day.

4. GAJVP, folio101v; GVP2, 2–4.

5. GAJVP, folio 102v.

6. VBHAA2,71–72.

7. GAJVP, folio 105r–105v.

8. ITC, 154–155.

9. ITC, 154; and VBHAA2, 78.

10. ITC, 155.

11. My italics. VBHJ2, 206. Note that this passage is from Van Braam’s diary entry for the next banquet, in Dezhou, Shandong. I moved it here for compositional purposes.

12. Qianlong Emperor, Edict of fifty-ninth year, twelfth month, first day (December 22, 1794), in HLGJ, 371–372. Duyvendak translates this passage as well, calling it nothing short of an imperial apology. DUYVLE, 87–88.

13. It’s interesting that Van Braam’s phrase about the Chinese preferring the Dutch to the English was removed from the next draft of his account, and from his published book. VBHM1, p. 174.

14. GAJVP, folio 107r–107v.

15. ITC, 155.

16. GAJVP, folio 108v.

17. GVP2, 12–13.

18. VBHAA2, 90.

19. VBHAA2, 88–90.

20. ITC, 156–157.

21. ITC, 156–157.

22. ITC, 156–157.

23. The first part of this quote is from VBHM1, 174. “Gilded by the rays” is from VBHAA2, 94.

24. ITC, 156; VBHAA2, 97–98.

25. GAJVP, folio 111v.

26. ITC, 157.

27. VBHAA2, 99.

28. VBHAA2, 87–88; GVP2, 11–12.

29. VBHAA2, 103.

30. GAJVP, folio 112r–112v.

31. Wang Xiaoting 王晓亭, “Qianlongdi liudeng Taishan” 乾隆帝六登泰山, *Gugong bowuyuan yuankan* 故宫博物院院刊 1983 vol., no. 4: 92–94.

32. VBHAA2, 102; ITC, 158.

33. GAJVP, folios 112r–113v.

34. VBHAA2,100–104.

35. ITC, 158.

36. GAJVP, folio 116v.

37. GAJVP, folio 117.

38. GVP2, 23–24.

39. Titsingh says “common hut” (ITC, 159). Van Braam calls it a “sorry inn” (VBHAA2, 109).

40. ITC, 159. The Beng River's flow varies tremendously from year to year. Shang Qing 尚清 “Benghe gaikuang” 沅河概況, Langya News Net 琅琊新聞網, August 9, 2017, http://www.langya.cn/lyzt/lyhzz/hlgk/201708/t20170811_488436.html, retrieved October 19, 2020.

41. As in Honghuapu (紅化鋪), whose streets are crowded with people who want to look at the Europeans. As they exit the city, they see some of the same people who were staring at them heading back to their fields.

42. VBHAA2, 116–117.

43. GVP2, 28.

44. GVP2, 28–29.

45. GAJVP, folio 121v.

46. ITC, 161.

47. ITC, 161.

48. GAJVP, folio 123r–123v.

49. Guignes estimates that it's 500 to 600 toises wide at this point, which is about two-thirds of a mile.

50. GAJVP, folio 122.

51. GAJVP, folio 122v.

52. VBHAA2, 122.

53. GAJVP, folio 123r–123v.

54. ITC, 162.

Chapter Eighteen

1. Baoying (寶應), Fanshui (汎水), Gaoyou (高郵).

2. Van Braam calls this particular place Bening Temple or Fau-si.

3. GVP2, 36.

4. GVP2, 36–38.

5. VBHAA2, 137.

6. ITC, 165.

7. Yuping Ni, *Customs Duties in the Qing Dynasty, ca. 1644–1911* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), especially chapter 4, pp. 67–69.

8. Guignes says five stories (GVP2, 37); Titsingh says seven (ITC, 165.). It seems Titsingh is right.

9. GAJVP, folio 127r–127v.

10. I believe this may be the 塔灣行宮, but they call it Ou-yuan or Ong-uun (VBHAA2, 138). I thought perhaps it might be 福緣寺 (although 福緣 would be pronounced fuk-jyun in Cantonese), but the location isn't right. The most likely candidate is the imperial residence of Gaomin Temple, built during the Kangxi period. Why the travelers refer to it Ou-yuan or Ong-uun isn't clear. In addition, Guignes refers to its having been built 190 years before 1795, which would be 1605 or so (GVP2, 138–139).

11. GVP2, 138.

12. GVP2, 138–139.

13. William Chambers, *Designs of Chinese Buildings, Furniture, Dresses, Machines, and Utensils* (London: Published for the Author and sold by him next door to Tom's Coffee-house, 1757), quote from p. 1.

14. Chambers, *Designs*, pp. 15 and 19.

15. GVP2, 41–42.

16. VBHAA2, 138–140.

17. GAJVP, folios 127v–129v.

18. GVP2, 41–42.

19. GVP2, 42–43.

20. VBHAA2, 146.

21. The locals say that Golden Mount Temple enwraps the mountain (金山寺裏山).
22. VBHAA2, 148–151.
23. GVP2, 45. I'm not sure which mountain this is. At first, they walked along the riverbank for a while toward a mountain with a tower on it (possibly Beigu Mountain and the Ganlu Temple 北固山, 甘露寺), hoping to climb it for a view, but their way was blocked by a waterway, so they returned and instead climbed a nearby mountain, on top of which stood a little pagoda. It's probably not Xiangshan 象山, which would be past Beigu Mountain. There were several other mountains on the right bank of the Yangtze in the Zhenjiang area.
24. GAJVP, folios 130r–133v; GVP2, 43–48.
25. GAJVP, folio 132r.
26. GVP2, 46–47.
27. Old walls: GAJVP, folio 132v; bridges GAJVP, folios 130r–133v.
28. VBHAA2, 155.
29. VBHAA2, 154.
30. GAJVP, folio 137v; see also folio 145v.
31. GAJVP, folios 130r–133v.
32. VBHAA2, 172.
33. VBHAA2, 171–173.
34. GAJVP, folio 137v.
35. “Fall hat” is “valhoed.” ITC, 168–169.
36. GVP2, 50.
37. GAJVP, folio 136v.
38. This meeting takes place in Hangzhou, a week after they pass through Zhenjiang. VBHV2, 51–52.
39. It seems unlikely that her feet were fully bound, based on his description. On footbinding, see Dorothy Ko, *Cinderella's Sisters: A Revisionist History of Footbinding* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), and Dorothy Ko, *Every Step a Lotus: Shoes for Bound Feet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).
40. 上有天堂, 下有蘇杭.
41. Matteo Ricci, cited in Michael Marme, *Suzhou: Where the Goods of All Provinces Converge* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005), p. 20.
42. VBHAA2, 168–175.
43. VBHAA2, 173.
44. VBHAA2, 176.
45. ITC, 170–171.
46. VBHJ2, 258.
47. VBHAA2, 175.
48. ITC, 170–171.
49. VBHAA2, 177–178.
50. VBHAA2, 178.
51. VBHAA2, 177–178.
52. ITC, 171–172.
53. ITC, 171–172.
54. VBHAA2, 182.
55. GAJVP, folios 141r–142v. (Folios 141v and 142r are blank.)
56. VBHAA2, 194–195. Van Braam finds it surprising that these mulberry trees seem to be the same sort they have in Europe—including in Dutch gardens—which suggests that there's no need to resort to the rarer wild mulberry trees to feed silkworms, as cultivators in France and Italy have asserted.
57. VBHAA2, 190.
58. GAJVP, folio 146r.
59. VBHV1, p. 360.
60. Van Braam calls the place he describes Quon-con-can, and on maps from around

the time, the place Wanggangjing 旺岡徑 (Cantonese: Wong-gong-qing) appears in the right place, between Pingwangzhen (平望鎮) and Jiaxingfu (嘉興府). See “Sisheng Yunhe” Map. VBHAA2, 192–193.

61. VBHAA2, 186–187.

62. VBHAA2, 205–206.

63. Marco Polo, *The Travels*, translated by Nigel Cliff (London: Penguin Classics, 2015), unpaginated.

64. Marco Polo, *The Travels of Marco Polo*, edited by Hugh Murray (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1845), 188.

65. Polo, *Travels* (Murray edition), 198.

66. Polo, *Travels* (Murray edition), 188.

67. Polo, *Travels* (Murray edition), 193.

68. Jean-Baptiste Du Halde, *The General History of China: Containing a Geographical, Historical, Chronological, Political, and Physical Description of the Empire of China, Chinese-Tartary, Corea, and Thibet* (London: J. Watts, 1741 [third edition]), vol. 1, 193.

69. GVP2, 67; ITC, 175.

70. VBHAA2, 212–213. This quote may well be from Van Braam’s exit from the city after the reception.

71. De Guigne’s translation. He also transcribes the inscription. GVP2, 68.

72. GVP2, 67.

73. GVP2, 67–68.

74. Une figure prévenante. GVP2, 68.

75. For more on Jiqing and his rule as viceroy, see Robert Antony, *Unruly People: Crime, Community, and State in Late Imperial China* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2016), 200–201; Wensheng Wang, *White Lotus Rebels and South China Pirates: Crisis and Reform in the Qing Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 95–99; and R. Kent Guy, *Qing Governors and Their Provinces: The Evolution of Territorial Administration in China, 1644–1796* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2013), 138. Jiqing’s death is rather more contested than the snuff bottle anecdote suggests. See Zhu Chengru 朱誠如, “Jiaqingchao Liangguang zongdu Jiqing ziqiang de beihou” 嘉慶朝兩廣總督吉慶自戕案的背後, *Qingshi jingjian: buji lingdao ganbu qingshi duben* 清史鏡鑒：部級領導幹部清史讀本, no 5. (2012): 117–122.

76. ITC, 175.

77. ITC, 175.

78. Polo, *Travels* (Murray edition), 188. I altered the translation slightly.

79. Polo, *Travels* (Murray edition), 195.

80. Du Halde, *General History*, vol. 1 (1741), 195.

81. ITC, 175.

82. GVP2, 70.

83. They don’t mention Yue Fei by name, just referring to an official who was unjustly executed and subsequently pardoned. This seems to be the extent of their knowledge of the case, although they passed the house of his accuser (Qin Hui 秦檜), on March 19, when they were approaching Suzhou.

84. ITC, 175–176. See also GVP2, 70–71.

85. GVP2, 71.

86. VBHAA2, 220–221.

87. GVP2, 73.

88. GVP2, 73.

89. VBHAA2, 223.

90. GVP2, 74.

91. GVP2, 74. Another legend about this well is equally fabulous. Once upon a time the trickster monk Ji Gong (濟公) wanted to help build this temple, so he acquired lumber and floated it down the Yangtze and then up the Qiantang River. But before he reached the West Lake area, a customs officer stopped him and demanded he pay a toll.

Ji Gong smiled and said, “Would you tax the wood if it were under the water instead of on top of the water?”

“If it sinks it’s not wood,” said the customs officer. Ji Gong stomped his feet on his raft. It began to sink. The man didn’t collect his tolls. As for the sunken wood, in three days it began appearing in the well. Log by log, the monks and workers fished it out and built the temple.

92. Guignes renders its meaning as the Tower of Wind and Thunder (雷風塔). The word “peak” (峰) is a homonym of the word “wind” (風).

93. There are other variants, including 雷峰西照.

94. GVP2, 75.

95. GVP2, 75.

96. GAJVP, folios 153v, 154r.

97. VBHAA2, 220.

98. VBHAA2, 221–222.

99. VBHAA2, 222.

100. ITC, 178.

101. GAJVP, folio 154r.

102. GVP2, 79–80.

Chapter Nineteen

1. ITC, 178–179.

2. ITC, 179.

3. VBHAA2, 235.

4. GVP2, 77.

5. Song-dynasty poet Fan Zhongyan (范仲淹, 989–1052).

6. It’s not a high tide day. Titsingh writes: “It was no spring tide, but it ran very strong, although not with the noise of [the tide] in the Ganges, because here it doesn’t bounce up against any banks.” ITC, 179.

7. VBHAA2, 234.

8. VBHAA2, 235.

9. GAJVP, folio 158r.

10. ITC, 179.

11. VBHAA2, 236.

12. GVP2, 79–80.

13. GVP2, 89–91.

14. VBHAA2, 246; VBHAA2, 237–238.

15. This is, I believe, the place Van Braam is referring to when he writes “Tan-tcha-coo.”

16. VBHAA2, 242.

17. Yanzhou Prefecture is present-day Meichengzhen 梅城鎮.

18. VBHAA2, 257.

19. ITC, 181.

20. VBHAA2, 266.

21. VBHAA2, 266.

22. Jean-Baptiste Du Halde, *Description of the Empire of China and Chinese-Tartary*, vol. 1 (London: T. Gardner, 1738), p. 273.

23. Du Halde, *Description*, vol. 1 (1738), p. 275.

24. See, for example, Susan Richter, “Der Monarch am Pflug: Von der Erweiterung des Herrschaftsverständnisses als erstem Diner zum ersten Landwirt des Staates,” *Das achtzehnte Jahrhundert* 34(1) (2010): 40–64; Henry Higgs, *The Physiocrats: Six Lectures on the French Economistes of the 18th Century* (London: Macmillan and Co, 1897), 140; John Shovlin, *The Political Economy of Virtue: Luxury, Patriotism, and the French Revolution*

(Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2007), 90. On the Austrian example, Shovlin cites Paul H. Johnstone, “The Rural Socrates,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 5.2 (1944): 151–175, p. 164.

25. VBHAA2, 267.
26. VBHAA2, 269.
27. VBHAA2, 282–283.
28. ITC, 184.
29. ITC, 183.
30. GAJVP, folios 168v–169r.
31. VBHV2, 3.
32. VBHV2, 4.
33. VBHV2, 6.
34. GAJVP, folio 170r.
35. VBHV2, 8.
36. GAJVP, folio 171r.
37. GVP2, 97–98.
38. VBHV2, 8.
39. ITC, 184–185.
40. GVP2, 98.
41. ITC, 184–185.
42. GAJVP, folio 170r.
43. VBHV2, 31.
44. GVP2, 174.
45. VBHV2, 28. Ouang-kia-pou is probably 黃邱鋪. It doesn’t seem to be on modern maps but is on an 1864 map of Jiangxi, just west of Guixi (貴溪). See “Jiangxi quantu” 江西全圖, in *Daqing yitong yudi quantu* 大清一統輿地全圖 (Hubei Province: Guanshujia, 1864), Library of Congress Geography and Map Division, Washington, DC, <https://www.loc.gov/item/gm71005118>, retrieved October 19, 2020.
46. GVP2, 101–102.
47. Guignes says to the West; Van Braam says to the South, although that doesn’t accord with modern maps.
48. VBHV2, 39.
49. VBHV2, 45.
50. GAJVP, folio 179r.
51. This porcelain he actually purchases the next day. VBHAA2, 46.
52. VBHV2, 46.
53. Biographical details for 陳淮, *Zhongguo lidai renwu chuanji ziliaoku* 中國歷代人物傳記資料庫 Academia Sinica, Taiwan, <http://archive.ihp.sinica.edu.tw/ttscgi/ttsquery?0:0:mctauac:NO%3DNO2086>, retrieved October 19, 2020.
54. He Yanquan 何炎泉, “Chen Huai de shuhua houcang yu Jiaqing huangdi de ‘Midian zhulin, shiqu baoji’ sanbian” 陳淮的書畫收藏與嘉慶皇帝的《秘殿珠林·石渠寶笈》三編, *Gugong Xueshu jikan* 故宮學術季刊, no. 32, 2015 (Minguo 104), 139–179.
55. ITC, 188.
56. ITC, 188; VBHV2, 48.
57. ITC, 192.
58. Van Braam’s description is from a different observation, several days later (April 28). VBHV2, 122. On today’s observation, see GVP2, 113–114.
59. VBHV2, 82.
60. ITC, 192.
61. Bodies: GVP2, 113–114; GAJVP, folios 192v–193v; dogs eating corpse: GVP2, 114.
62. VBHV2, 87; GAJVP, folio 189r; ITC, 193.
63. GVP2, 120.
64. VBHV2, 117.

65. GVP2, 121.
66. VBHV2, 130.
67. VBHV2, 130.
68. VBHV2, 130–132.
69. VBHV2, 130–132.
70. VBHV2, 133.
71. ITC, 195–196.
72. Nieuhof, *Gezantschap*, 125.
73. VBHV2, 119–210. Cf. GAJVP, folio 213r.
74. ITC, 197.
75. VBHV2, 145.
76. VBHV2, 151.
77. ITC, 197.
78. ITC, 199–200.
79. VBHV2, 155.
80. GAJVP, folio 202r.
81. GAJVP, folio 202v.
82. ITC, 200.
83. VBHV2, 161.
84. Also known as Budai, 布袋. Van Braam calls the figure the Chinese “god of sensuality.”
85. ITC, 200.
86. GAJVP, folio 204v.
87. ITC, 201.
88. ITC, 201.
89. GVP2, 129.
90. GAJVP, folio 203v; GVP2, 129.
91. ITC, 201.
92. VBHV2, 170–171.
93. VBHV2, 169.
94. VBHV2, 175. He’s talking, among others, about the “frightening mountains of Tan-tchi-ki, which are composed of rocks.”
95. GAJVP, folio 210v.
96. VBHV2, 177.
97. ACJ, 5R.
98. ITC, 203.
99. ACJ, 5R.
100. VBHV2, 179.
101. VBHV2, 179.
102. A painting likely inspired by or based on Van Braam’s sketch is “Vue du Pagode de Coenyam dans la crevisse d’un roc, 6 mai” (觀音岩 near 英德 in Guangdong), painting by Chinese artist, supposedly after sketch by Van Braam, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Florence, Italy, Album of Chinese drawings and documents. No title. BR 350, no. 38. The painting he commissioned is “Yingde Guanyin Temple” 英德觀音岩, Watercolor, Album of Chinese landscapes in the region of Canton, from Van Braam Collection, British Museum, 1928, 0323, 0.44. Unfortunately, I wasn’t able to include either of these images in this book. Guignes also makes a sketch, reproduced in his book, which is, again, altogether different: “The Guanyin Temple (觀音岩) near Yingde (英德),” from GVP4, no. 80. The Nieuhof image is “The Guanyin Temple (觀音岩) near Yingde (英德),” from Nieuhof, *Gezantschap*, p. 63.
103. Guignes says, in his diary, that the boy’s name is Jean Sperie. See GAJVP, folio 215r. Van Braam transliterates it as “Jean Spierjee.” VBHV2, 192.
104. GAJVP, folio 215v.
105. Van Braam says fourteen (VBHV2, 192); Guignes says sixteen (GAJVP, folio

215r).

106. VBHV2, 192.

107. VBHV2, 193.

108. See Du Halde, *General History*, vol. 1, p. 240.

109. At Shaozhou, where other boats were switched out for heavier Canton boats, Titsingh insisted on keeping his boat, being unhappy with the new one. His captain happened to have had experience sailing all the way to Canton, so this was allowed. ITC, 202.

110. VBHV2, 200.

111. Two and a half leagues. Guignes thinks this is an exaggeration. He estimates that Foshan is only a league in length—less than half of Van Braam's estimation. "The missionaries," he writes, "have spoken a great deal about this place, and they have, I believe, considerably exaggerated its population." GVP2, 140.

112. GVP2, 140.

113. VBHV2, 202–203.

114. VBHV2, 203.

115. ITC, 206–208.

116. VBHV2, 204.

117. Canton Dagregister, December 1, 1793–January 12, 1795; OIC 195: 351–485, 471–472.

118. DMA, 1795, R. 637. No pagination. About a fifth of the way in.

119. Letter from Alexander Murray, of the ship *Middlesex*, Canton, to undisclosed Dutch leaders in Canton, no date, but probably around December 20, 1794; OIC 195: 781.

120. Letter from Dozy, Rabinel, Steijn, Zeeman, and Bergman in Macao to the Hoog Edele Groot Achtbare Heeren bewinthebberen en gemagtigde uijt de illustre vergadering van zeeventhienden tot de secrete zaken der generale nederlandsche oost indische compagnie residerende in The Hague, April 29, 1795, OIC 196: unfoliated; Letter/declaration from Gregorio Chan in Canton, January 28, 1795, in Portuguese, followed by a Dutch translation, OIC 196, unfoliated; Letter from C Adriaansz. and J. H. van Noten to R. J. Dozy, January 24, 1795, OIC 196, unfoliated.

121. VBHV2, 205.

122. ITC, 206–208.

Chapter Twenty

1. ITC, 208.

2. VBHJ2, 479.

3. VBHV2, 206–207.

4. VBHV2, 207; ITC, 208; VBHM2, 410.

5. GAJVP, folio 221r.

6. GVP2, 141–143.

7. VBHJ2, 479; VBHM2, 410.

8. Letter from Isaac Titsingh in Canton to Wouter en Mevr. van Tintelaar in Amsterdam, May 12, 1795, in ITPC1, 426.

9. Letter from Isaac Titsingh in Canton to broer en zuster (D. H. van Rossum & Anna Maria Elisabeth) in Amsterdam, May 12, 1795, in ITPC1, 428ff.

10. Letter from Isaac Titsingh in Canton to broer en zuster (D. H. van Rossum & Anna Maria Elisabeth) in Amsterdam, May 12, 1795, in ITPC1, 428ff.

11. Letter from Isaac Titsingh in Canton to broer en zuster (D. H. van Rossum & Anna Maria Elisabeth) in Amsterdam, May 12, 1795, in ITPC1, 429.

12. Letter from Isaac Titsingh in Canton to Maria Cornelia Matthes in Amsterdam, May 12, 1795, in ITPC1, 427.

13. Letter from Isaac Titsingh in Canton to to the Hoog Edele Gestrenge Heeren Commissarissen Generaal over s'comps bezittingen in India en Cabo de Goede Hoop in Batavia, May 26, 1795, OIC 196: unfoliated.

14. Letter from Isaac Titsingh in Canton to to the Hoog Edele Gestrenge Heeren Commissarissen Generaal over s'comps bezittingen in India en Cabo de Goede Hoop in Batavia, May 26, 1795, OIC 196: unfoliated.

15. Letter from J. C. Nederburgh and Commissioners General in Batavia, to Isaac Titsingh in China, August 22, 1795, in RAB 262, Bijlagen tot de resolutiën van Commissarissen Generaal, 1795 juli 11–1795 september 12, nos. 866–960, unpaginated, but this is item number 920, about 4/5 of the way through.

16. Letter from J. C. Nederburgh and Commissioners General in Batavia, to Isaac Titsingh in China, August 22, 1795, in RAB 262, Bijlagen tot de resolutiën van Commissarissen Generaal, 1795 juli 11–1795 september 12, nos. 866–960, unpaginated, but this is item number 920, about four-fifths of the way through.

17. Consultations Entry for May 10, 1795, in East India Company Canton Factory Records 1596–1833, G.12 (108) (1794), p. 284.

18. A declaration of the Commercial Council about the geregtigheid, March 15, 1796, OIC 196: unfoliated. See also letter from Isaac Titsingh in Canton to to the Hoog Edele Gestrenge Heeren Commissarissen Generaal over s'comps bezittingen in India en Cabo de Goede Hoop in Batavia, May 26, 1795, OIC 196: unfoliated. See also letter from Isaac Titsingh in Canton to Sebastiaan Cornelis Nederburgh in Batavia, January 6, 1796, ITPC1, 445–446.

19. I've translated “stadhouderlijke” house to “royal house.” Letter from R. Dozy, J. H. Rabinel, Chris Bergman, J. Bletterman, Zeeman, and J. A. van Braam in Canton to the Hoog Edele Groot Achtbare Heeren Gecommitteerde Beviwindhebberen en Gevolmagtigden uit de Illustre Vergadering van Zeventien tot den Directen Vaart en Handel der Edele Generale Nederlandsche Geotroijeerde Oost Indische Compagnie op China, residende te Amsterdam, January 6, 1796, OIC 196, 13 pp., p.3.

20. China, February 1795, R. 637. Unpaginated.

21. See Memorial from Zhu Gui, Deputy Viceroy of the Two Guangs (署理兩廣總督), Qianlong 60, 6th month, 21st day, in *Ming-Qing gong cang Zhong-Xi shangmao dang'an* 明清宮藏中西商貿檔案, vol. 4 (Beijing: Zhongguo dang'an chubanshe, 2010), 2435–2443.

22. DMA, June 1795, R. 637. Unpaginated. Almost halfway down. The image is included in the diary and thus available online, and it is accompanied by a verse from baroque poet Luis de Góngora, on whom, see Kenneth Muir, “Algunos problemas en torno a la traducción del teatro del Siglo de Oro,” *Cuadernos de teatro clásico* 4 (1989): 87–93, p. 90.

23. H. B. Morse, *The Chronicles of the East India Company, Trading to China 1635–1834*, vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1927), 271.

24. Morse, *Chronicles*, 272.

25. Jörg, *Porcelain*.

26. For more on the debts and fortunes of the Chinese merchant houses, see Paul Van Dyke, *Merchants of Canton and Macao: Politics and Strategies in Eighteenth-Century Chinese Trade* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2011); Paul Van Dyke, *Merchants of Canton and Macao: Success and Failure in Eighteenth-Century Chinese Trade* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2016); Frederic Delano Grant, Jr., *The Chinese Cornerstone of Modern Banking: The Canton Guaranty System and the Origins of Bank Deposit Insurance 1780–1933* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 2014); Ch'en Kuo-tung Anthony 陳國棟, *The Insolvency of the Chinese Hong Merchants, 1760–1843*, 2 vols. (Taipei: Academia Sinica, 1990).

27. The Dutch generally did not trade with Shy Kinqwa, because they didn't trust him.

28. Letter from Isaac Titsingh in London to Guillelmus Titsingh in Amsterdam, March 30, 1797, in ITPC1, 501.

29. Letter from R. Dozy, J. H. Rabinel, Chris Bergman, J. Bletterman, Zeeman, J. A. van Braam in Canton to the Hoog Edele Groot Achtbare Heeren Gecommitteerde Beviindhebben en Gevolmagtigden uit de Illustre Vergadering van Zeventien tot den Directen Vaart en Handel der Edele Generale Nederlandsche Geoctroijeerde Oost Indische Compagnie op China, residerende te Amsterdam, January 6, 1796, OIC 196, 13 pages, info from p. 11.

30. The Danes didn't fully abandon the Canton trade until 1806, but there were no Danish ships in China in 1795.

31. The Revolutionary Wars are a confusing time for alliances. Great Britain concluded an agreement with Spain in May 1793 and with Portugal in September 1793. In July 1795, Spain made peace with France, but news of this event didn't arrive in China for months. For a list of treaties made during the Revolutionary Wars, see Charles Knight, *The Popular History of England*, vol. 7 (London: Bradbury and Evans, 1861), 412–413.

32. DMA, 1795, R. 637. No pagination. About three-fifths of the way down.

33. Letter from Isaac Titsingh in Canton to Sebastiaan Cornelis Nederburgh in Batavia, December 20, 1795, in ITPC1, 436.

34. Letter from J. A. van Braam in Canton to his father J. P. van Braam in Zwolle, June 15, 1796, in JAVB, vol. 2, pp. 16–27, 17.

35. IIT, unpaginated.

36. Letter from J. A. van Braam in Canton to his father J. P. van Braam in Zwolle, June 15, 1796, in JAVB, vol. 2, pp. 16–27, 20.

37. Letter from J. A. van Braam in Canton to his father J. P. van Braam in Zwolle, May 11, 1795, in JAVB, vol. 2, pp. 1–3, 2.

38. Letter from J. A. van Braam in Canton to his father J. P. van Braam in Zwolle, November 25, 1795, in JAVB, vol. 2, pp. 4–8, 5.

39. On Jacob Andries's temper, see letter from J. A. van Braam in Canton to his father J. P. van Braam in Zwolle, November 2, 1797, in JAVB, vol. 2, pp. 49–55, 51.

40. Letter from J. A. van Braam in Canton to his father J. P. van Braam in Zwolle, November 25, 1795, in JAVB, vol. 2, pp. 4–8, 6.

41. Jacob Andries van Braam, "Extract Missive Gezonden aan den HEG J.P. van Braam, dato 25 November 1795," in JAVB, vol. 2, pp. 27–31, 29–30. Note that this "extract" contains materials not present in the typescript of the original November 25, 1795 letter, which is pp. 4–8.

42. Jacob Andries van Braam, "Extract Missive Gezonden aan den HEG J.P. van Braam, dato 25 November 1795," in JAVB, vol. 2, pp. 27–31, 29–30.

43. Jacob Andries van Braam, "Extract Missive Gezonden aan den HEG J.P. van Braam, dato 25 November 1795," in JAVB, vol. 2, pp. 27–31, 30.

44. Letter from J. A. van Braam in Canton to his father J. P. van Braam in Zwolle June 15, 1796, in JAVB, vol. 2, pp. 16–27, 25–26.

45. Letter from J. A. van Braam in Canton to his father J. P. van Braam in Zwolle November 25, 1795, in JAVB, vol. 2, pp. 4–8, 5.

46. Letter from J. A. van Braam in Canton to his father J. P. van Braam in Zwolle June 15, 1796, in JAVB, vol. 2, pp. 16–27, 19.

47. Letter from Isaac Titsingh in Canton to Sebastiaan Cornelis Nederburgh in Batavia, December 20, 1795, ITPC1, 437–440, 437. This unmasking occurred earlier, during the voyage, but Titsingh notes that he doesn't discuss it in earlier letters.

48. On Monqua and his organization, see Paul Van Dyke, *Merchants*, vol. 2 (2016), especially pp. 39–60.

49. Letter from Isaac Titsingh in Canton to Sebastiaan Cornelis Nederburgh in Batavia, December 20, 1795, ITPC1, 437–440, 439–440.

50. Letter from Isaac Titsingh in Canton to Sebastiaan Cornelis Nederburgh in Batavia, December 20, 1795, ITPC1, 437–440, 440. Jacob Andries van Braam has a different perspective on the incident, upholding his uncle's conduct and accusing Dozy

of misleading Titsingh. See letter from J. A. van Braam in Canton to his father J. P. van Braam in Zwolle, November 2, 1797, in JAVB, vol. 2, pp. 49–55, 54.

51. DMA, November 1795, R. 637. No pagination, about three-fifths of the way down.

52. He has received permission from the Commercial Council, having persuaded its members that “necessity eliminates even the strongest law.” Letter from A. E. van Braam Houckgeest in Canton to Isaac Titsingh and the other members forming the Commercial Council of the Dutch Direction of Canton in China, October 13, 1795, OIC 196, unfoliated. The council is concerned about permitting this but accedes to his request. Resolution of Commercial Council of Canton, October 30, 1795, National Archives of the Netherlands, OIC 196, unfoliated.

53. Letter from Isaac Titsingh in Canton to Sebastiaan Cornelis Nederburgh in Batavia, December 20, 1795, ITPC1, 437–440, 438.

54. Letter from Everardus van Braam Houckgeest in Canton to the CCGG in Batavia, November 15, 1794, in Bijlagen to the “Verslag der verrichtingen van commissarissen-generaal over 1 januari 1795 tot 30 april 1795, met alphabetisch register der marginalia en register der bijlagen en bijlagen,” dated April 20, 1795, RAB, no. 322, bijlage no. 303 (unpaginated). https://www.nationaalarchief.nl/onderzoeken/archief/2.01.27.02/invnr/322/file/NL-HaNA.2.01.27.02.322_0302, retrieved October 19, 2020.

55. Letter from Isaac Titsingh in Canton to Sebastiaan Cornelis Nederburgh in Batavia, December 20, 1795, ITPC1, 437–440, 440.

56. Letter from Isaac Titsingh in Canton to Sebastiaan Cornelis Nederburgh in Batavia, December 20, 1795, ITPC1, 440–441.

57. Letter from J. A. van Braam in Canton to his father J. P. van Braam in Zwolle, November 25, 1795, in JAVB, vol. 2, pp. 4–8, 6.

58. Letter from Isaac Titsingh in Canton to Wouter en Mevr. van Tintelaar in Amsterdam, May 12, 1795, in ITPC1, 426.

59. Letter from J. A. van Braam in Canton to his father J. P. van Braam in Zwolle, January 24, 1796, in JAVB, vol. 2, pp. 8–11, 10.

60. Letter from J. A. van Braam in Canton to his father J. P. van Braam in Zwolle, March 10, 1796, in JAVB, vol. 2, pp. 11–16, p. 16.

61. Letter from J. A. van Braam in Canton to his father J. P. van Braam in Zwolle, January 24, 1796, in JAVB, vol. 2, pp. 8–11, 10.

62. Letter from B. Zeeman and J. A. van Braam in Canton “aan den eersten supercarga des E E Heere R. I Dozij ende de verdure heeren lieden van den commercie Raad des E Nederland Oost Ind Comp., in Bedenkinge omtrent de Resolutie genoomen in den Commercie raad Canton in China,” January 20, 1796, including some excerpts of letters, OIC 196. OIC 196 is unfoliated, but this source, a collection of documents, is foliated, from 1 to 19.

63. He points out that Jacob Andries and the others didn’t object when, just a short while ago, the elder Van Braam received compensation for meals during the period of the embassy. Titsingh opposed the compensation, on the grounds that Van Braam usually ate at the company’s table. Letter from Isaac Titsingh in Canton to Sebastiaan Cornelis Nederburgh in Batavia, March 15, 1796, in ITPC1, 454–455.

64. Protest “van de Assistenten J.H. Bletterman, B. Zeeman, and J.A. van Braam, gedaan in de extraordinaire Vergadering van de 20 Januarij 1796,” OIC 196 (196 is unfoliated, but “Bedenkingen” in which this letter falls, is foliated, and this “Protest” is on p. 17).

65. Letter from Rabinel, Bletterman, Zeeman, Van Braam, van Schoor, Bosma, and H. Bergman in Canton to the Hoog Edele Groot Acthbare Heeren Gecommitteerde Bewindhebbers en gevolmagtigden uit de Vergadering van xvii tot den directen Vaart en Handel der Edele Nederlandsche geotroijeerde Oost-Indische Compagnie op China residerende te Amsterdam, OIC 196, unfoliated (3 pp.).

66. Letter from Issac Titsingh in Canton to the General Commissaries in Batavia,

January 30, 1796, OIC 196: unfoliated.

67. How does he justify taking passage on a British ship, during this “hateful war”? By pointing out that he’s saving the company money—after all, it must pay him 600 piasters per month until his repatriation. “I can’t in good conscience ask the company to continue to waste six hundred piasters per month on a useless freeloader, and anyway, if I were to stay here it would be the death of me.” Letter from Isaac Titsingh in Canton to Sebastiaan Cornelis Nederburgh in Batavia, March 15, 1796, in ITPC1, 454. (“Hateful war” is from letter from Issac Titsingh to Batavia, March 20, 1796, OIC 196: unfoliated.) Just in case, he requests that the commercial council sign a document making clear that “there are no other possible passages available ... besides one of the English company ships to Europe.” Jacob Andries van Braam, “Extract Missive Gezonden aan J. P. van Braam, dato 25 November 1795,” in JAVB, vol. 2, pp. 27–32, 31. Jacob Andries notes that “we could have refused to sign this, in recompense for his treatment [of us], especially since we were not convinced of the truth of this declaration,” but he just wants Titsingh gone. On the contents of Titsingh’s cargo, see letter from Isaac Titsingh written aboard the British ship *Cirencester* to Dirk Herman van Rossum, Abraham Everardus de Wit, Pieter Cornelis Heidweiler, and Johannes Kluppel in Amsterdam, March 22, 1796, in ITPC1, 462–463.

68. Timon Screech and Isaac Titsingh, *Secret Memoirs of the Shoguns: Isaac Titsingh and Japan, 1779–1822* (London: Routledge, 2009), 60.

69. Letter from Isaac Titsingh in Canton to Sebastiaan Cornelis Nederburgh in Batavia, March 15, 1796, in ITPC1, 454.

70. Letter from J. A. van Braam in Canton to his father J. P. van Braam in Zwolle, March 10, 1796, in JAVB, vol. 2, pp. 11–16, 12.

71. I’ve changed the wording slightly for clarity and fixed a typographical error. The spelling of the name “Britsingh” is intentional. Some of Titsingh’s work in Europe was published under this mistaken name. In Jacob Andries van Braam, “Extract Missive Gezonden aan J. P. van Braam, dato 25 November 1795,” in JAVB, vol. 2, pp. 27–32, 30.

72. Letter from Isaac Titsingh in London to Cornelis van Citters in Chinsura, January 6, 1797, in ITPC1, 464.

73. Letter from Isaac Titsingh in London to Henrietta Maria Dozy (born Blondeel) in the Cape of Good Hope, March 5, 1797, in ITPC1, 484–486; Letter from Isaac Titsingh in London to Dirk Herman van Rossum, Abraham Everardus de Wit, Pieter Cornelis Heidweiler, and Johannes Kluppel in Amsterdam, December 16, 1796, in ITPC1, 464.

74. Letter from Isaac Titsingh in London to John Jervis in London, March 12, 1797, in ITPC1, 497–498. Note that Screech is wrong that Titsingh took half of the gifts for the “King of Holland.” (See Screech, *Secret Memoirs*, p. 60.) Those gifts in fact stayed in Canton. Years later, Qianlong’s successor, the Jiaqing emperor, sought to return them, and the documents make clear that the gifts for the “king” of Holland had been in Canton since 1795: Hutuli 瑚圖禮 (Manchu: hūturī), “Liangguang zongdu tibao enshang Helan guowang gewu bing gongshi huiguo riqi” 兩廣總督題報恩賞荷蘭國王各物並貢使回國日期, Jiaqing seventh year, twelfth month, twenty-first day (January 14, 1803), in *Ming-Qing dang’an* 明清檔案, A313-025, Academia Sinica Grand Secretariat Archives Project, Institute of History and Philology, Academia Sinica, Taiwan. See also letter from Issac Titsingh to Batavia, March 20, 1796, OIC 196: unfoliated; and letter from Bagman and Zeeman in Canton to Dozy in Canton, February 28, 1796, OIC 196, unfoliated. As for his personal gifts from the emperor, he asked for and received express permission from Nederburgh to keep them, complaining that Van Braam didn’t wait for permission to take his. Letter from Isaac Titsingh in Canton to Sebastiaan Cornelis Nederburgh in Batavia, January 6, 1796, ITPC1, 445–446.

75. Isaac Titsingh in London to Henrietta Maria Dozy-Blondeel in the Cape of Good Hope, March 5, 1797, in ITPC1, 484–486, 485. Titsingh did manage to recover some of the money, in a move that Jacob Andries describes as underhanded. See letter from J. A.

van Braam in Canton to his father J. P. van Braam in Zwolle, November 2, 1797, in JAVB, vol. 2, pp. 49–55, 54.

76. Letter from Isaac Titsingh in London to Johannes Kluppel in Amsterdam, March 30, 1797, in ITPC1, 500–501.

77. Letter from Isaac Titsingh in Bath to Johannes Kluppel in Amsterdam. Bath, February 23, 1797, ITPC1, 475.

78. Doltish manservant: ITPC1, 480; lack of copyist: ITPC1, 488; “eternally happier,” ITPC1, 479–480.

79. Letter from Isaac Titsingh in London to Jan Pieter Baumgardt in Cape of Good Hope, January 20, 1797, in ITPC1, 466–467. Frances Wilton is Lady Chambers, wife of Sir Robert Chambers, the great professor of law, whom Titsingh met in Bengal.

80. Screech, *Secret Memoirs*, 61.

81. Frank Lequin, *Isaac Titsingh (1745–1812): Een passie voor Japan: Leven en werk van de grondlegger van de Europese Japanologie* (Alphen aan den Rijn: Canaletto, 2002), p. 184.

82. Letter from Isaac Titsingh in London to Henrietta Maria Dozy-Blondeel in Cape of Good Hope, April 2, 1797, in ITPC1, 484–486, 485; Letter from Isaac Titsingh in London to Abraham Everardus de Wit in Amsterdam, March 12, 1797, in ITPC1, 502–504, 503.

83. Isaac Titsingh in London to Guilelmus Titsingh, Amsterdam, March 30, 1797, in ITPC1, 501.

84. Poem by Petrus van Rossum (1778–1856), in Lequin, *Passie*, 251–252.

85. Santje is Susana Jacoba Kluppel. Lequin, *Passie*, p. 189.

86. Lequin, *Passie*, p. 189.

87. Letter from Isaac Titsingh in Amsterdam to William Marsden, London, February 3, 1809, in ITPC1, 533.

88. Letter from Isaac Titsingh in Paris to Nicolaus Engelhard in Batavia, November 27, 1810, in ITPC1, 540.

89. Letter from Isaac Titsingh in Paris to William Marsden in London, January 29, 1807, in ITPC1, 526.

90. I’ve altered the punctuation and spelling. Letter from Isaac Titsingh in Paris to William Marsden in London, June 15, 1810, in ITPC1, 537.

91. “Voilà où la fraternité nous a réduite.” Cited in Lequin, *Passie*, p. 208.

92. Letter from Isaac Titsingh in Paris to William Marsden in London, December 5, 1811, in ITPC1, 543–544. For more on Titsingh’s publishing travails, and for a translation of one of his works, see Screech, *Secret Memoirs*.

93. I translate *borstwaterzucht* as “pleursy.” M. Nepveu, “Advertisement Respecting the Manuscripts of M. Titsingh,” in M. Titsingh, *Illustrations of Japan* (London: R. Ackerman, 1822), vii.

94. Lequin, *Passie*, p. 217.

95. Letter from Isaac Titsingh in Paris to Nicolaus Engelhard in Batavia, November 27, 1810, in ITPC1, 539–543, 541.

96. Lequin, *Passie*, p. 220.

97. Falck, cited in Lequin, *Passie*, 219.

98. Lequin, *Passie*, 255ff.

99. Letter from Isaac Titsingh in Canton to Sebastiaan Cornelis Nederburgh in Batavia, December 20, 1795, ITPC1, 437–440, 440.

100. FVBH1, 143, 140.

101. J.P.W.A. van Braam Houckgeest, “Leven en bedrijf van Andreas Everardus van Braam Houckgeest (1739–1801),” *Bulletin van het Rijksmuseum* 35 (1) (1987): 22–31, 25.

102. FVBH1, 140.

103. FVBH1, 146–147.

104. Van Braam probably took elements of this design from a coin designed by Benjamin Franklin in 1776. Amy Hudson Henderson, “Furnishing the Republican Court: Building and Decorating Philadelphia Homes, 1790–1800,” PhD dissertation, University

of Delaware, 2008, 422–425. Leonard Blussé points out that the Latin inscription is probably a joke at the expense of the British. Blussé, *Visible Cities*, 90.

105. Oars and white-clad servants, from William Russell Birch's autobiography, cited in FVBH1, 245.

106. Moreau, in VBHV1, xiii (English: VBHAA1, xiii).

107. Julian Niemcewicz, *Under Their Vine and Fig Tree: Travels through America in 1797–1805. With some Further Account of Life in New Jersey*, published as vol. 14 in *Collections of New Jersey Historical Society of Newark* (Elizabeth, NJ: Grossman Publishing, 1965), p. 62.

108. Niemcewicz, *Under Their Vine*, 63.

109. Moreau de Saint Mery, cited in FVBH1, 154.

110. William Russell Birch, cited in FVBH1, 154.

111. These are held now in the British Library: "Compleat Geographij of the whole Empire of China, with addition of the Tartar Regions under the Dominion of the Chinese Monarch," British Library, Shelfmark: Cartographic Items 118.d.30.

112. "Notice of a Collection of Chinese Drawings, in the Possession of M. Van Braam," in VBHAA2, 306.

113. These images are copies from originals that Van Braam borrowed from the Canton merchant Paonkequa, who assured him that the buildings depicted really exist. But Paonkequa and Van Braam had a falling out, and Van Braam's not sure how much credence he can give to him, or to the French missionaries who have produced similar prints in Europe. Given how large were the parts of the imperial gardens that he himself saw, he finds it hard to believe that there is another part so large and opulent that he hasn't seen. FVBH1, 157.

114. Are all the notations by Van Braam himself? It's difficult to know for certain, although Niemcewicz suggests as much. Niemcewicz, *Under Their Vine*, 63.

115. "La chine il avance beaucoup." Letter from Cazenove to Moreau de Saint-Méry, in Moreau de Saint-Méry, *Voyage aux États-Unis de l'Amérique, 1793–1798* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1913), 228.

116. Cited in FVBH1, 194.

117. C. F. Volney, *A New Translation of Volney's Ruins: or Meditations on the Revolution of Empires*, translated by Thomas Jefferson and Joel Barlow (Paris: Levrault, 1802), 138–139.

118. Niemcewicz, *Under Their Vine*, 64.

119. Apparently this opulence wasn't unprecedented. A farm offered for sale in 1800 advertised its dairy "on a very good plan, laid with marble." *The American and Daily Advertiser*, April 17, 1800, p. 1, cited in Elinor F. Oakes, "A Ticklish Business: Dairying in New England and Pennsylvania, 1750–1812," *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies*, 47 (3) (1980): 195–212, p. 197.

120. Niemcewicz, *Under Their Vine*, 63.

121. Niemcewicz, *Under Their Vine*, 63.

122. FVBH1, 198–200.

123. FVBH1, 200.

124. Niemcewicz, *Under Their Vine*, 62–63.

125. Niemcewicz, *Under Their Vine*, 62–63.

126. Letter from Talleyrand in Paris to Saint Méry in Philadelphia, February 17, 1797, cited in FVBH2, 325.

127. FVBH2, 324–325.

128. Van Braam's brother finds it uninteresting, especially compared to an account of Macartney's mission that has just come out. Letter from J. P. van Braam in Ittersum bij Zwolle to his son J. A. van Braam in Canton, July 17, 1798, in JAVB, vol. 1, pp. 57–63, 61.

129. VBHAA1, xv.

130. VBHAA1, xix.

131. André Everard van-Braam Houckgeest (Andreas Everardus van Braam Houckgeest), *Voyage de l'ambassade de la Compagnie des Indes Orientales hollandaises, vers l'empereur de la Chine, en 1794 et 1795, où se trouve la description de plusieurs parties de cet empire inconnues aux Européens; tiré du journal d'André Everard van-Braam Houckgeest*, 2 vols. (Paris: Chex Garnery, 1798 [an 6 de la republique]).

132. André Everard van Braam Houckgeest, *Reise Der Gesandtschaft Der Holländisch-Ostindischen Gesellschaft an Den Kaiser Von China, in Den Jahren 1794 Und 1795*, 2 vols. (Leipzig: J. S. Heinsius, 1798–1799); Andreas Everard van Braam Houckgeest, *Reize van het gezantschap der Hollandsche Oostindische Compagnie naar den Keizer van China in den jaare 1794 en 1795*, 2 vols. (Haarlem: François Bohn, 1804–1806); Everard van Braam Houckgeest, *Gesandtskabsreise til Kejseren af Kina i Aarene 1794 og 1795, foranstaltet af det hollandsk-ostindiske Selskab, og indeholdende en Beskrivelse over adskillige for Europæerne hidindtil ubekjendte Dele af China*, 3 vols. (Copenhagen: A Goldins Forlag, 1799); VBHAA1; VBHAA2.

133. Blussé, *Visible Cities*, 89; J.P.W.A. van Braam Houckgeest, “Leven en bedrijf van Andreas Everardus van Braam Houckgeest (1739–1801),” *Bulletin van het Rijksmuseum* 35 (1) (1987): 22–31, 25. Guignes doubts the significance and sincerity of this “gift,” noting how Van Braam was dismissive toward France, saying that “she would soon be removed from the list of great powers.” GVP1, 255.

134. See Stewart Mims, “Introduction,” in Moreau de Saint-Méry, *Voyage aux États-Unis de l'Amérique*, xxvi–xxvii.

135. FVBH1, 198.

136. FVBH1, 247–248.

137. Cited in FVBH1, 247.

138. FVBH1, 256–261.

139. For a stunning and well-written overview of this process, see Alexander Statman, “The Tarot of Yu the Great: The Search for Civilization’s Origins between France and China in the Age of Enlightenment,” in Paula Findlen, ed., *Empires of Knowledge: Scientific Networks in the Early Modern World* (London: Routledge, 2019), 246–268; Alexander Statman, “Fusang: The Enlightenment Story of the Chinese Discovery of America,” *Isis* 107 (1) (2016): 1–25; and Alexander Statman, “A Forgotten Friendship: How a French Missionary and a Manchu Prince Studied Electricity and Ballooning in Late Eighteenth Century Beijing,” *East Asian Science, Technology, and Medicine* 46 (2017): 89–118.

140. A third British attempt at direct talks, the so-called Napier Affair, wasn’t a formal embassy on the model of those of Macartney and Amherst, but it, too, is quite instructive, having failed even more spectacularly. See Hao Gao, “Prelude to the Opium War? British Reactions to the ‘Napier Fizzle’ and Attitudes towards China in the Mid Eighteen-Thirties,” *Historical Research* 87 (237) (2014): 491–509.

Conclusions

1. “Verslag der verrichtingen van commissarissen-generaal over 1 september 1796 tot 30 april 1797. Met alphabetisch register der marginalia en register der bijlagen,” dated April 30, 1797, Dutch National Archives, The Hague, Raad der Aziatische Bezittingen (2.01.27.02) no. 330, §228–229, pp. 335–337.

2. Letter from Jean-Baptiste-Joseph de Grammont in Beijing to Manuel de Agote in Macau, October 4, 1795, in DMA, December 1795, R. 637. Unfoliated, about four-fifths of the way to end.

3. Anonymous 1 (in Canton), letter to Agote in Macau, May 17, 1795, DMA, 1795, R. 637 (unfoliated); Anonymous 2 (in Canton), letter to Agote in Macau, May 17, 1795 (the authors of these two letters are different from each other; both are anonymous), DMA, 1795, R. 637, unfoliated.

4. Anonymous 2 (in Canton), letter to Agote in Macau, May 17, 1795, DMA, 1795, R. 637, unfoliated.

5. DMA, May 1795, R. 637, unfoliated.

6. DMA, May 1795, R. 637, unfoliated. Agote might have been biased. He didn't like Titsingh, who he felt shunned him and other Spaniards, and he did like Macartney, who treated him well and borrowed Spanish books. Titsingh and Agote got along well at first, but evidence suggests that later the Spaniard felt dishonored by Titsingh and came to dislike him. See letter from J. A. van Braam in Canton to his father J. P. van Braam in Zwolle, June 15, 1796, in JAVB, vol. 2, pp. 16–27, 18. On the books, see DMA, June 1793, R.635; on the social calls, see DMA, December 1793, R. 637.

7. BTC.

8. The Grammont letter was recopied and reprinted in many places. See for example, BTC, 5–6; and DMA, December 1793, R. 635, no pagination, about four-fifths of the way down.

9. BTC, 6–7.

10. BTC, 347–348.

11. John Barrow, *An Auto-Biographical Memoir of Sir John Barrow, Bart., Late of the Admiralty; Including Reflection, Observation, and Reminiscences at Home and Abroad, from Early Life to Advanced Age* (London: John Murray, Albemarle Street, 1847), 98.

12. BTC, footnote, 347–348.

13. For instance, he writes about “the manner in which the Dutch Embassadors were conveyed to *and from* the capital in the middle of winter” and says that “in their journey they were harrassed beyond measure. My italics. BTC, 9. “Stable” is at BTC, 7.

14. J. L. Cranmer-Blyng, *An Embassy to China: Being the Journal Kept by Lord Macartney during His Embassy to the Emperor Ch'ien-Lung* (London: Longmans, 1962), 158.

15. BTC, 144.

16. BTC, 9.

17. VBHAA1, 238.

18. BTC, 14–15.

19. Guignes, *Observations*, 13. Guignes was taken to task for making mistakes of his own. See M. Montucci, “Audi alteram partem, ou Réponse de M. Montucci à la Lettre de M. de Guignes insérée dans les *Annales des Voyages*” (Berlin: Impr. de J.F. Starcke, 1810). This in turn was a response to an article by Guignes about Montucci's review of his *Voyage*: Chrétien-Louis-Joseph de Guignes, “Lettre sur les remarques faites par M. Montucci sur le Voyage à Péking, de M. de Guignes, Paris, ce 15 janvier 1810,” *Bulletin des voyages, de la géographie et de l'histoire*, no. 29 (1810), 229–248.

20. Guignes, *Observations*, 8 and 3.

21. Guignes, *Observations*, 6–7.

22. GVP1, 254.

23. Guignes, *Observations*, 6–7.

24. One of the most important was American scholar-diplomat William Rockhill, who published a book-length study of the history of Chinese diplomacy, writing that the Dutch were “treated as freaks of nature, to be stared at and to afford amusement for the crowd.” Rockhill, *Diplomatic*, 33. Rockhill, like Barrow, had political reasons for denigrating the Dutch. He himself had devised an agreement that substituted new diplomatic procedures for imperial encounters in China, which he felt was the final victorious battle in a centuries-long war for Western dignity.

25. Osterhammel, *Unfabling*, 146. Like Barrow and Rockhill, Osterhammel mentions only the negative experiences, and although he does briefly note that the Dutch had a better time on their return to Canton, he provides no details about that return or about the unprecedentedly warm treatment the Dutch received in Beijing and Yuanmingyuan. His overall portrayal is unfairly negative, and he refers to the mission as “the catastrophic Dutch embassy” (p. 180).

26. Alain Peyrefitte, *Immobile*, 496–498.

27. For instance, J. L. Cranmer-Byng, “Lord Macartney’s Embassy to Peking in 1793,” *Journal of Oriental Studies* 4 (1, 2) (1957–1958): 117–187, 177. Keevak, *Embassies*, 68; David Banks, “The Politics of Practice: Diplomacy and Legitimacy in International Society,” PhD dissertation, George Washington University, Washington, DC, 2015, 178.

28. DUYVLE; DUYVSD; J.J.L. Duyvendak, “The Last Dutch Embassy in the ‘Veritable Records,’ ” *T’oung Pao*, second series, vol. 34 (1938): 223–227; Boxer, “Isaac Titsingh’s Embassy,” 28.

29. DUYVLE, 53.

30. GAJVP. The manuscript has been misidentified a number of times, but internal evidence—including the use of the first-person singular pronoun and close similarities to Guignes’s published book—indicates that Guignes was the author. See the section in this book, “A Note on Place Names, Transliterations, Terms, and Sources.” Duyvendak admitted that he didn’t read the French text carefully but was nonetheless convinced that the anonymous diary was a French translation of Titsingh’s report (DUYVLE, 12). Frank Lequin lambastes Duyvendak for this and other mistakes, saying that he made “a complicated mess of incorrect evidence and interpretations” (ITC, 52). Elsewhere he criticizes Duyvendak’s “haste with his erudite [*hooggeleerde*] source critiques: no time (or interest?) in reading pieces from A to Z” (Frank Lequin, in ITVT, 161). Boxer didn’t read the diary carefully either.

31. The lines are:

Nous voila délivré de tous les mandarins
favente deo
illi rohur et aes triplex
circa pectus erat
qui le premier dans ces pais sauvages
eut le desir de voir de stupides visages.

The Latin lines, with the exception of the first (“with God’s favor”), are from a famous passage in the *Odes* of Horace, which can be translated as follows:

A brass-clad heart of oak had he
Who was the first to launch a frail
Craft upon the crafty sea
Undaunted by a Southerly gale.

—(Translation by Robert Bly, ed., *Horace, The Odes: New Translations by Contemporary Poets*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002, I.3, p. 23.
I changed “brass-bound” to “brassclad.”)

The manuscript only uses the first line, however, followed by two lines of French. The entire passage can be translated as follows:

By the Grace of God,
A brass-clad heart of oak had he
Who, the first one in savage lands,
Had the desire to see stupid faces.

32. Boxer, “Isaac Titsingh’s Embassy,” 28.

33. DUYVLE, 18.

34. “Extract missive geschreeven door de Hoog Edele Ge.. s.. Commissarissen Generaal over geheel Nederlands India en Cabo de Goede Hoop aan de Hooge Indiasche Regeering, gedateerd Batavia den 9 Julij 1794”; OIC 195: 127–132, 129. The phrase “ceremonial embassy” also appears in Titsingh’s official instructions: IIT, unpaginated.

35. “Extract missive geschreeven door de Hoog Edele Ge.. s.. Commissarissen Generaal over geheel Nederlands India en Cabo de Goede Hoop aan de Hooge Indiasche Regeering, gedateerd Batavia den 9 Julij 1794”; OIC 195: 127–132, 128.

36. IIT, unpaginated.

37. They weren’t the only ones. Even Van Braam’s nephew, Jacob Andries van Braam, who was present for the entire mission, wrote that “it is inconceivable that the commissioners sent this embassy for the sole purpose of complimenting the emperor on the sixtieth anniversary of his coronation.” Letter from Jacob Andries van Braam in

Canton to his father J. P. van Braam in Zwolle, June 15, 1796, in JAVB, vol. 2, pp. 16–27, 17. He couldn't of course, read the secret correspondence of his bosses, or the instructions that they gave to Titsingh.

38. DUYVLE, 27. See also Banks, "Politics of Practice," 178.

39. Zhang Yufen 張毓芬, "Lun Jiaqing chunian de 'Xianyu weixin' " 論嘉慶初年的咸與維新, *Qingshi yanjiu* 清史研究 1992, no. 4: 49–54; Daniel McMahon, "Dynastic Decline, Heshen, and the Ideology of the Xianyu Reforms," *Tsinghua Journal of Chinese Studies*, new series, 38 (2008): 231–255; William T. Rowe, "The Significance of the Qianlong-Jiaqing Transition in Qing History," *Late Imperial China*, 32 (2) (2011): 74–88, 78.

40. David Kang, *East Asia before the West: Five Centuries of Trade and Tribute* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010); David Kang, "Hierarchy and Legitimacy in International Systems: The Tribute System in Early Modern East Asia," *Security Studies* 19 (2010): 591–622. For a compelling critique of Kang's work from a historian's perspective, see Joshua Van Lieu, "The Tributary System and the Persistence of Late Victorian Knowledge," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 77 (2017): 73–92. For my own doubts about the way that Kang counts the number of wars in East Asia, see Tonio Andrade, *The Gunpowder Age: China, Military Innovation, and the Rise of the West in World History, 900–1900* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016), 377–378, note 4.

41. Brantly Womack, "Recognition, Deference, and Respect: Generalizing the Lessons of an Asymmetric Asian Order," *Journal of American-East Asian Relations* 16 (1–2) (2009): 105–118, 109.

42. Daniel A. Bell, "Realizing Tianxia: Traditional Values and China's Foreign Policy," in Ban Wang, ed., *Chinese Visions of World Order: Tianxia, Culture, and World Politics* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017), 129–148, 129. Some Chinese scholars make similar claims, of whom the most prominent is Zhao Tingyang. See Zhao Tingyang (趙汀陽), *Tianxia tixi: Shijie zhidu zhexue daolun* 天下體系：世界制度哲學導論 (Nanjing: Jiangsu jiaoyu chubanshe, 2005); Zhao Tingyang, "All-under-Heaven and Methodological Relationism: An Old Story and New World Peace," In Fred Dallmayr and Zhao Tingyang, eds., *Contemporary Chinese Political Thought: Debates and Perspectives* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2012); Zhao Tingyuan, "Rethinking Empire from a Chinese Concept 'All-under-Heaven' (Tian-xia, 天下)," *Social Identities* 12 (1) (January 2006): 29–41. Other Chinese scholars who are proponents of Tianxia-style ideas include Yan Xuetong, Ban Wang, and Qin Yaqing. See Yan Xuetong, Daniel Bell, Zhe Sun, and Edmund Ryden, *Ancient Chinese Thought, Modern Chinese Power* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013); and Ban Wang, *Chinese Visions of World Order: Tianxia, Culture, and World Politics* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017). Critics have argued that this Tianxia idea is merely a justification for a new Chinacentric hegemony. For instance, William Callahan writes, "rather than guide us toward a post-hegemonic world order, Tianxia presents a new hegemony where imperial China's hierarchical governance is updated for the twenty-first century." William A. Callahan, "Chinese Visions of World Order: Post-Hegemonic or a New Hegemony?" *International Studies Review* 10 (4) (2008): 749–761, 749. Another critique of the Tianxia idea is that it is not compatible with democracy, something that Zhao Tingyang readily admits. He thinks democracy sucks, because "the masses always make the wrong choices for themselves through a misled democracy." Zhao Tingyuan, "Rethinking Empire from a Chinese Concept 'All-under-Heaven' (Tian-xia, 天下)," *Social Identities* 12 (1) (2006): 29–41, 31.

43. John K. Fairbank and Su-yu Teng, "On the Ch'ing Tributary System," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 6 (1941): 135–246; John K. Fairbank, "A Preliminary Framework," in John K. Fairbank, ed., *The Chinese World Order: Traditional China's Foreign Relations* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968); John K. Fairbank, "Introduction: The Old Order," in John K. Fairbank (ed.), *The Cambridge History of China, Vol 10: Late Ch'ing 1800–1911, Part 1* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 1–34, esp. 29–34.

44. John K. Fairbank, "Tributary Trade and China's Relations with the West," *The Far*

Eastern Quarterly 1 (2) (1942): 129–149, esp. 148–149.

45. As James Hevia writes, “Fairbank uncritically accepted the premises of a British colonial discourse that emphasized Chinese ‘exclusiveness,’ and re-worked it as ‘sinocentrism,’ a critical component of the tribute system.” James L. Hevia, “Tribute, Asymmetry, and Imperial Formations: Rethinking Relations of Power in East Asia,” *Journal of American-East Asian Relations* 16 (1–2) (Spring–Summer 2009): 69–83, 70, note 4. Joshua Van Lieu argues along similar lines (Van Lieu, “The Tributary System”).

46. For a short biography of Wills, see Tonio Andrade, “John E. Wills, Jr., 1936–2017: An Appreciation,” *H-Asia, Humanities and Social Sciences Online*, February 2017, <https://networks.h-net.org/node/22055/pages/168428/john-e-wills-jr-1936%E2%80%932017-appreciation-tonio-andrade>, retrieved October 19, 2020. See also Tonio Andrade and Kenneth M. Swope, eds., *Early Modern East Asia: War, Commerce, and Cultural Exchange—Essays in Honor of John E. Wills, Jr.* (New York: Routledge, 2017).

47. Wills, *Pepper*, and Wills, *Embassies*.

48. Wills, *Embassies*, 179.

49. Even when adhering to the concept, he made clear that it didn’t always apply. For instance, he found that sometimes Qing officials seemed quite aware that Europeans and others didn’t see themselves as supplicants and sometimes adopted a realistic and nimble approach to diplomacy, escaping the strictures of the “tribute system.” Similarly, Europeans—especially the Dutch—often understood and accepted that the Qing might wish to believe that Dutch participation in imperial guest rituals would be taken as tribute. They just didn’t trouble themselves about it. See, for example, Wills, *Embassies*, 3.

50. He begins to explicitly express this view around 1999, in John E. Wills, Jr., “Did China Have a Tribute System?” *Asian Studies Newsletter* 44 (1999): 12. In the first decade of the new millennium, he came to reject the tribute system altogether. See Hevia, “Tribute,” 69. It’s important to note that he continued to feel that the “tribute system” framework did indeed apply to the early Ming dynasty, from about 1425 to 1550. He himself came to embrace a model of “asymmetrical power,” as propounded in the work of Brantly Womack. See Brantly Womack, *China and Vietnam: The Politics of Asymmetry* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006). See also Brantly Womack, “Recognition, Deference, and Respect: Generalizing the Lessons of an Asymmetric Asian Order,” *Journal of American-East Asian Relations* 16 (1–2) (2009): 105–118.

51. His argument is that British resistance to Qing ritual superiority led British scholars (and thence scholars elsewhere in the West) to the view that Qing diplomacy was atavistic and irrational, in opposition to European diplomacy, which was supposedly modern and rational. See especially Hevia, *Cherishing*.

52. Hevia uses quite different terminology, writing about the ways that guest ritual played a role in “constituting an imperial formation.” For example, he writes, “all those activities outlined in a text such as *Da Qing Tongli* (Comprehensive Rites of the Great Qing) are not just window dressing, are not just things to be set aside so that we can get on with the study of realpolitik or the economic functions of the tribute system. Texts like *Da Qing Tongli* are, in fact, guides for making complex agents, because it is only through such agents that the world can be formed and reformed, and in the case of the Qing imperial formation, linked to the Cosmos (tian).” Hevia, “Tribute,” 81.

53. “What is of particular interest about the Qing,” he wrote, “is that they engaged these different forms of power, and rather than attempting to eradicate them, recognized the overlap and embraced them.” Hevia, “Tribute,” 82.

54. Hevia, “Tribute,” 82.

55. On the New Qing history, see especially Joanna Waley-Cohen, “The New Qing History,” *Radical History Review* 88 (2004): 193–206; Evelyn S. Rawski, “Reenvisioning the Qing: The Significance of the Qing Period in Chinese History,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 55 (4) (1996): 829–850; Ho Ping-ti, “In Defense of Sinicization: A Rebuttal of

Evelyn Rawski's 'Reenvisioning the Qing,' " *Journal of Asian Studies* 57 (1) (1998): 123–155; Pamela K. Crossley, *A Translucent Mirror: History and Identity in Qing Imperial Ideology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); Mark C. Elliott, *The Manchu Way: The Eight Banners and Ethnic Identity in Late Imperial China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001); James A. Millward, Ruth W. Dunnell, Mark C. Elliott, and Philippe Forêt, eds., *New Qing Imperial History: The Making of Inner Asian Empire at Qing Chengde* (London: Routledge, 2004); and Rawski, *The Last Emperors. A New Qing History perspective on the tribute system can be seen in Peter Perdue, "A Frontier View of Chineseness,"* in Giovanni Arrighi, Takeshi Hamashita, and Mark Selden, eds., *The Resurgence of East Asia, 500, 150 and 50 Year Perspectives* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), 51–77. A fascinating and compelling perspective on Chinese international relations is given by Zhang Feng, who notes that Chinese international relations had different modes. Sometimes it was very clearly focused on realpolitik, in which times, the Chinese government in question was flexible and responsive, often treating other states as allies, respected rivals, or even equals. At other times, it doubled down on the Sinocentric rhetoric. That's because Chinese international relations had two motivations: legitimacy and security. Peaceful? Unworried? Then focus on the legitimacy side of things. Worried about security? Focus more on realpolitik. See Zhang Feng, "Rethinking the 'Tribute System': Broadening the Conceptual Horizon of Historical East Asian Politics," *Chinese Journal of International Politics* 2 (2009): 597–626; Zhang Feng, *Chinese Hegemony: Grand Strategy and International Institutions in East Asian History* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2015).

56. Song Nianshen rejects the term "tribute" and instead uses the term "zongfan order," suggesting that the Qing were very flexible in their treatment of different states at different times and writing that the "zongfan order was often ambiguous and elastic." Song Nianshen, " 'Tributary' from a Multilateral and Multilayered Perspective," *Chinese Journal of International Politics* 5 (2012): 155–182, 177.

57. Hevia, "Tribute," 82–83.

58. Peter Perdue writes, "Like "pidgins," or trading languages in all multicultural contact zones, tribute discourse permitted extensive commercial exchange, masking the different self-conceptions of its participants with formal expressions, but allowing each, in different degrees, a measure of autonomy." Peter Perdue, "A Frontier View of Chineseness," in Arrighi et al., eds., *The Resurgence of East Asia*, 51–77, 67. On "language game," see Prasenjit Duara, "The Chinese World Order as a Language Game," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 77 (1) (2017): 123–129. Saeyoung Park suggests that the "tributary system" as traditionally defined was a "modernist artifact" and that the tributary system was primarily a flexible set of practices and discourses focused on domestic legitimacy, an argument that Wills would have approved of. Saeyoung Park, "Me, Myself, and My Hegemony: The Work of Making the Chinese World Order a Reality," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 77 (2017): 47–72.

59. Takeshi Hamashita, "The Tribute System and Modern Asia," *Memoirs of the Research Department of the Toyo Bunko* 46 (1988): 7–25, esp. 13.

60. Song, " 'Tributary.' " Song prefers the term "zongfan relationship" to "tribute system" (see p. 156 of the paper).

61. See especially the brilliant paper by Sun Laichen, "Suzerain and Vassal, or Elder and Younger Brothers: The Nature of the Burmo-Chinese Historical Relationship," Paper delivered at the Association for Asian Studies 49th Meeting, Chicago, March 13–16, 1997.

62. Burma is an excellent case. See Sun Laichen, "Imperial Ideal Compromised: Northern and Southern Courts across the New Frontier in the Early Yuan Era," In James A. Anderson and John K. Whitmore, eds., *China's Encounters on the South and Southwest: Reforging the Fiery Frontier over Two Millennia* (Leiden, the Netherlands: Brill, 2014), 194–231.

63. For more on the 1752 Portuguese embassy, see note 5 in the Prologue of this

book.

64. Mark Ravina, *To Stand with the Nations of the World: Japan's Meiji Restoration in World History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 33–37.

65. The sankin-kōtai 参勤交代 system.

66. Wills, “Functional,” 477.

67. Brantly Womack, “Recognition, Deference, and Respect: Generalizing the Lessons of an Asymmetric Asian Order,” *Journal of American-East Asian Relations* 16 (1–2) (2009): 105–118, 109.

68. Cited in FVBH1, 78.

69. See, for instance, Christian Windler, “From Social Status to Sovereignty: Practices of Foreign Relations from the Renaissance to the *Sattelzeit*,” in Tracey Sowerby and Jan Hennings, eds., *Practices of Diplomacy in the Early Modern World, c. 1410–1800* (London: Routledge, 2017), 255–265. The notion of this key nineteenth-century *Sattelzeit* is inspired in part by the work of Reinhart Koselleck.

70. Christian Windler, *La diplomatie comme expérience de l'autre: consuls français au Maghreb, 1700–1840* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 2002).

71. Patricia Owens O'Neill, “Missed Opportunities: Late 18th Century Chinese Relations with England and the Netherlands,” PhD dissertation, University of Washington, 1995, p. 505.

72. Note that this is an ideal of East Asian diplomacy, and that in practice, things could be quite different. Sometimes ambassadors did indeed negotiate treaties, with interrelations seeming more like those between Western-style sovereign states.

73. “Extract missive geschreeven door de Hoog Edele Ge.. s.. Commissarissen Generaal over geheel Nederlands India en Cabo de Goede Hoop aan de Hooge Indiasche Regeering, gedateerd Batavia den 9 Julij 1794”; OIC 195: 127–132, 129. The phrase “ceremonial embassy” also appears in Titsingh's official instructions: IIT, unpaginated.

74. This phrase is from letter from the Chairman and the Deputy Chairman of the East India Company to Henry Browne et al in Canton, April 25, 1792, in Earl Pritchard, “The Instructions of the East India Company to Lord Macartney on His Embassy to China and His Reports to the Company, 1792–4, Part I: Instructions from the Company,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* 70 (2) (1938): 201–230, 207–208, note 5, quote from p. 208.

75. See especially Henry Dundas, “Instructions to Lord Macartney,” September 8, 1792, in H. B. Morse, *Chronicles of The East India Company Trading to China, 1635–1834*, vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1926), 232–242; and Pritchard, “Instructions.”

76. See Hevia, *Cherishing*, 58–59, 109–110.

77. Bronislaw Malinowski, “The Problem of Meaning in Primitive Languages,” in Charles K. Ogden and Ian A. Richards, eds., *The Meaning of Meaning* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench and Trubner, 1923), 296–336, 315.

78. See, for example, Brian Vick, *The Congress of Vienna: Power and Politics after Napoleon* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), esp. 327–332.

79. Wills, “Functional,” 477.

80. At one point, Wills suggests that favorable treatment by emperors wasn't just designed to signal imperial preference. “The Emperor's private tastes and curiosities might be as important as any politically motivated communication of favor.” Wills, *Embassies*, 176.

Acknowledgments

1. To access the Digital Archive System at the ANRI, click here: <https://sejarah-nusantara.anri.go.id>, retrieved October 18, 2020.

2. Andreas Everardus van Braam Houckgeest, *Per palankijn naar Peking, De reis van Andreas Everardus van Braam Houckgeest naar Keizer Qianlong van China in 1794/5*, edited

by Nanet van Braam Houckgeest. In preparation, expected 2022.

3. Brian E. Vick, *The Congress of Vienna: Power and Politics after Napoleon* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014).

4. Winnie Wong, *Van Gogh on Demand: China and the Readymade* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014); Winnie Wong, "After the Copy: Creativity, Originality and the Labor of Appropriation, Dafen Village, Shenzhen, China (1989–2010)," PhD dissertation, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2010.

A Note on Place Names, Transliterations, Terms, and Sources

1. *Kangxi huangyu quanlantu* (康熙皇輿全覽圖) (Beijing, 1721), at the Library of Congress Geography and Map Division, Washington, DC, under the title *Der Jesuiten-Atlas der Kanghsi-Zeit : China und die Aussenlaender*, republished by Walter Fuchs (Peking: Katholischen Universität, 1941), <https://lccn.loc.gov/74650033>, retrieved October 19, 2020; *Daqing yitong yudi quantu* (大清一統輿地全圖) (Hubei Province: Guanshuju, 1864), Library of Congress Geography and Map Division, Washington, DC, <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.gmd/g7823g.ct003391>, retrieved October 19, 2020; *Qianlong Jingcheng quantu* (乾隆京城全圖) (Beijing: 1750) [data set]. Japan National Institute of Informatics Digital Silk Road Project, Toyo Bunko, Tokyo, <http://dsr.nii.ac.jp/toyobunko/II-11-D-802/V-1/>, retrieved October 17, 2020.

2. Tonio Andrade, "Titsingh Mission Route Points," Google Map Project, <https://www.google.com/maps/d/edit?mid=1lrwA59U1nNvS1H6hX4ZhrM5kVs&usp=sharing>, retrieved October 19, 2020.

3. "Tribute," Merriam-Webster Dictionary, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/tribute>, retrieved June 3, 2020.

4. Harrison, "Chinese and British Diplomatic Gifts," 76–79.

5. A good place to start is the New Qing History debate: Rawski, "Reenvisioning;" Ho, "In Defense." On Chinese critiques of New Qing History as political, a good place to start is Li Zhiting 李治亭, "Xinqingshi": 'Xindiguo Zhuayi' Shixue Biaooben 「新清史」: 「新帝國主義」史學標本, "Zhongguo Shehui Kexue Bao 中國社會科學報, April 20, 2015, no. 728, available online at http://www.cssn.cn/bk/bkpd_qklm/bkpd_bkwz/201504/t20150422_1597874.shtml?COLLCC=2373765395&, retrieved October 19, 2020. The topic of New Qing History (新清史) has become a popular one in Chinese academic circles, generating dozens of articles, nearly all of them very critical. It's important to note, however, that the "New Qing History" as understood by Chinese academics is often a caricature of the nuanced work of the Western historians they attack. For instance, see the characterization of the work of Mark Elliott in Wang Rongzu 汪榮祖 et al., "Xinqingshi' yu Zhongguo lishi zutixing" [新清史] 與中國歷史主體性, *Dongfang Xuekan* 東方學刊, 1 (2019): 100–112, pp. 100–101. Another fascinating take on the Qing-as-empire question is Ge Zhaoguang, *Lishi Zhongguo de Nei yu Wai: Youguan (Zhongguo) yu (Zhoubian) gainian de zai chengqing* 歷史中國的內與外-有關[中國]與[周邊]概念的再澄清 (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2017).

6. *Zhongguo diyi lishi dang'anguan* 中國第一歷史檔案館, *Qianlongdi qijuzhu* 乾隆帝起居注, 42 vols. (Guilin: Guangxi Normal University Press, 2002); *Qianlong* 乾隆, *Qianlongchao shangyudang* 乾隆上諭檔, 18 vols., (Beijing: Zhongguo dang'an chubanshe, Zhongguo diyi lishi dang'anguan, 1991).

7. Gugong bowuyuan 故宮博物院, "Helan guojiao pin an shimo" 荷蘭國交聘案始末, *Wenxian congbian* 文獻叢編, no. 5 (July 1930 [Min guo 19]), unpaginated, found in Gugong bowuyuan 故宮博物院, *Wenxian congbian* 文獻叢編, 10 vols. (Beijing: Beijing tu shu guan chu ban she, 2008), vol. 3, 367–386. Compare to the far larger collection of similar materials pertaining to the Macartney mission, *Zhongguo diyi lishi dang'anguan* (中國第一歷史檔案館), *Yingshi Ma'jia'erni fanghua dang'an shiliao huibian* 英使馬戛爾尼訪華檔案史料匯編 (Beijing: Zhongguo xinhua shudian, 1996).

8. Phrases like “importunate demands” appear repeatedly in correspondence. For example, the emperor refers to “absurd demands” (妄有干請) in an edict on September 23, and official Guo Shixun excerpts that edict in his reply and mirrors Qianlong’s language, with a slight variation, “importunate and absurd demands” (妄有濫請). See Memorial from Guo Shixun (郭世勳), Governor of Guangdong, October 12, 1793 (QL58, ninth month, eighth day), in *Zhongguo diyi lishi dang’anguan* (中國第一歷史檔案館), *Yingshi Ma’jia’erni fanghua dang’an shiliao huibian* 英使馬戛爾尼訪華檔案史料匯編 (Beijing: Zhongguo xinhua shudian, 1996), 409–410, p. 409. Cf. Peyrefitte, *Vision*, 341–343, 342.

9. I supplied a copy of the journal to one of Van Braam’s relatives, Nanet van Braam Houckgeest, and she is preparing a transcription for publication.

10. Anonymous (Guignes), “‘Journal d’un voyage a Peking’ ... 22 Nov. 1794 to 11 May 1795.” British Library: Western Manuscripts, Add MS 18102.

11. I’ve been unable to locate Andries Jacob van Braam’s travel journal, which would be a fascinating source. I’d hoped to make a trip to Europe to search in a number of repositories, but the COVID-19 pandemic made travel impossible. I know it existed because of letters to his father: Letter from J. A. van Braam in Canton to his father J. P. van Braam in Zwolle, March 10, 1796, in “Briefwisseling tussen de Schout bij nacht J.P. van Braam, wonende te Zwolle, en diens zoon J. A. van Braam, assistent carga van de directe Chinese handel te Canton, 1795–1798,” Scheepvaartmuseum, Amsterdam, the Netherlands, inventory number S.3641, in typescript vol. 2, pp. 11–16; Letter from J. A. van Braam in Canton to his father J. P. van Braam in Zwolle, November 1, 1795, in “Briefwisseling tussen de Schout bij nacht J. P. van Braam, wonende te Zwolle, en diens zoon J. A. van Braam, assistent carga van de directe Chinese handel te Canton, 1795–1798,” Scheepvaartmuseum, Amsterdam, the Netherlands, inventory number S.3641, in typescript vol. 2, pp. 3–4. Other references to this journal recur in his correspondence.

12. “Guignes (Chrétien-Louis-Joseph de),” *Biographie des hommes vivants*, vol. 3 (Paris: Michaud, 1817), 338–339, p. 339.

13. Diarios de Manuel de Agote, Primary Representative in China of the Real Compañía de Filipinas, Untzi Naval Museum (UM), San Sebastián, Spain, Fond Manuel de Agote [Manuel de Agote Collection], 19 vols., inventory numbers R-633 (for the year 1779) to R-641 (1797), online at <https://itsasmuseoa.eus/es/coleccion/tipologia/fondo-manuel-de-agote>, retrieved October 19, 2020.

14. Art historian Dawn Odell is currently writing a book about Van Braam and his collection, whose working title is “Chinese Art and the Global Eighteenth Century: The ‘Lost’ Collection of Van Braam Houckgeest and Early American Cosmopolitanism.”

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